THE OPENED SHUTTERS

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

SYLVIA

From a drawing by Harrison Fisher

THE OPENED SHUTTERS

A Novel

by

Clara Louise Burnham

With Frontispiece by
Harrison Fisher

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TO

C. D. T.

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CHAPTER I

JUDGE TRENT

JUDGE TRENT'S chair was tipped back at a comfortable angle for the accommodation of his gaitered feet, which rested against the steam radiator in his private office. There had been a second desk introduced into this sanctum within the last month, and the attitude of the young man seated at it indicated but a brief suspension of business as he looked up to greet his employer.

The judge had just come in out of the cold and wet, and did not remove his silk hat as he seated himself to dry his shoes. He appeared always reluctant to remove that hat. Spotlessly clean as were always the habiliments that clothed his attenuated form, no one could remember having seen the judge's hat smoothly brushed; and although in the course of thirty years it is unlikely that he never became possessed of a new one, even the closest observer, and that was Martha Lacey, could not be certain of the transition period, probably owing to the lingering attachment with which the judge returned spasmodically to the headgear which had accommodated itself to his bumps, and which he was heroically endeavoring to discard.

This very morning Miss Lacey in passing her old friend on the street had been annoyed by the unusually

rough condition of the hat he lifted. A few steps further on she happened to encounter the judge's housekeeper, her market basket on her arm. Old Hannah's wrinkled countenance did not grow less grim as Miss Lacey greeted her, but that lady, nothing daunted, stopped to speak, her countenance alert and her bright gaze shining through her eyeglasses.

"I just met Judge Trent, Hannah. Dear me, can't you brush that hat of his a little? It looks for all the world like a black cat that has just caught sight of a mastiff."

"I guess the judge knows how he wants his own hat," returned Hannah, her mouth working disapprovingly.

"But he does n't realize how it looks. Some one asked me the other day if I supposed Judge Trent slept in his hat."

"And I s'pose you told 'em you did n't know," returned the old woman sourly. "He 's got a right to sleep in it if he wants to," and she moved on while Miss Lacey looked after her for a moment, her lips set in a tight line.

"Insolent!" she exclaimed. "All is I know he would n't do it if *I'd* married him," she added mentally, resuming her walk. Martha Lacey's sense of humor was not keen, but suddenly the mental picture of Judge Trent's shrewd, thin countenance, as it might appear in pillowed slumber surmounted by the high hat, overwhelmed her and she laughed silently. Then she frowned with reddening cheeks. "Hannah 's impertinent," she murmured.

Judge Trent had read something of disapproval in Miss Lacey's glance as she greeted him a few minutes ago, and he thought of her now as he sat tilted back,

his thumbs hooked easily in his arm holes, while he watched the glistening dampness dry from his shoes.

"Martha probably disapproved because I did n't have on my rubbers," he thought, an inward jerk acknowledging the humor of the situation. He had not spoken often with Martha Lacey for many a year. Twenty-five springs had rolled by now since he proposed to her. She had hesitated for a week or so, and then, some difference arising between them, she had refused him. He had led a busy life since then, absorbed in his profession of the law, and had won more than local fame. When recently he decided to take some one into his office and, as he put it, ease up on himself, John Dunham, Harvard graduate, recently admitted to the bar, thought himself a lucky man to get the position even though it exchanged Boston for life in a neighboring rural city.

"Plenty of trains for Boston every day," Judge Trent had said when the young fellow arrived. "If either one of us does n't like the arrangement you can take one any hour, and no harm done."

That was less than a month ago, but already Calvin Trent had changed his mind. Should he lose young Dunham, he would regret it.

He regarded John now as the clean-shaven profile bent over a lengthy document. The judge had the small man's admiration for the stature and build of his assistant. He liked the sunshine of his smile, the steady gaze of his eyes. The young man's personality had impressed him from the first; but it was after the judge had proved the temper of his mind and quickness of his perception that he allowed these physical advantages to take their place as valuable assets.

"The boy's well born, and well raised," he said to himself. "I suppose he's some kind of a fool, he's too young not to be; but there's no sign of it yet."

It was very pleasant not to have to hurry to the office in the morning, and not to be obliged to furnish all the brains that were supposed to be accessible in this home of the law.

After a few minutes' silence Judge Trent looked up again from his steaming shoes.

"Ever been in love, Dunham?" he asked suddenly.

The young lawyer raised his eyes, with evident effort to bring his attention from the subject in hand, and regarded the quaint face and figure of his employer.

The vagueness of his stare caused the judge to stir and cough with some embarrassment.

"Oh, no matter, of course. I just happened to think of it. When I was your age I had it bad: thought if I could n't have that one girl life would n't be worth living." The speaker's foot slipped on the radiator, and he readjusted his chair.

"Just happened to meet her out there a minute ago;" he jerked the tall hat in the direction of the street.

"That must have been rather startling." Dunham had by this time collected his ideas.

"Oh, no. We 've both always lived here; she's kept tab on me ever since; kind of puts the burden of proof on me to show that I can get along without her, if you understand."

"And you 've shown her, eh?"

" 'M, pretty so-so."

"You 've never married, I believe?"

John did not have to assume an interest. This spare little man was small only in physique. He was an object of interest to any and every ambitious young lawyer.

"No, never did." Judge Trent shook his head, and rocked his tilted chair gently. "I might count up the number of kitchen fires I've escaped building on cold winter mornings; the number of nocturnal rambles I've escaped taking with shrieking infants doubled up with the colic — and then there are my books! What would have become of my books! My fair one was the pizen-neat kind. She would have dusted them and driven me to drink!"

Dunham smiled. "And yet those are scarcely facts with which you can reassure her," he remarked.

Judge Trent caught the younger man's eye with a sympathetic twinkle.

"Precisely; and the sad consequence is that she has never been entirely reassured. Her name's against her, poor girl — Martha. Careful about many things."

"Then you had no successor?"

"No, and affairs piled up. I had too much to attend to to renew the attack. I did n't have time to smooth down her ruffled feathers, so — the result is that we've each flocked alone. Just as well, just as well," continued the speaker, musingly. "What I was thinking of just now was how many different lives we seem to live in one; how our tastes change; and at best how few illusions are left to lawyers regarding marriage."

"In other words, you're a confirmed old bachelor. What was it you asked me a minute ago — if I were in love?"

"Yes, or if you had been."

"Have been dozens of times, — am not," returned Dunham, with the smile that his employer liked.

"Just so, just so," the latter answered quickly. "We change. Read First Corinthians, seventh chapter, and if you take Paul's advice and don't pass the Rubicon, then you'll be free to change as often as you please."

Dunham looked up again. "Are you a Bible student, Judge Trent?"

"Student of everything," returned the lawyer, with a short wave of his thin hand.

"All books except woman's looks, eh?" answered Dunham, returning to his papers.

"I said I had no successors," remarked the judge, regarding his gaiters musingly. "I'm not at all sure of that. Miss — Martha was a very attractive woman. My impression is that in any case she preferred to concentrate all her faculties upon watching to see that I did n't get into mischief."

"That's faithfulness, I'm sure," returned Dunham. "The necessity for building those kitchen fires would n't exist now," he added suggestively.

"Young man, no levity," returned the judge.

There was silence for a few minutes, broken only by the turning of the crisp papers as Dunham continued his researches. At last the telephone bell rang and Dunham answered it. As he hung up the receiver Judge Trent spoke:—

"Just call up the railway station, will you, and secure a chair for me in the nine o'clock train for Boston Wednesday morning?"

John obeyed, and as he returned to his desk his employer continued: —

"I may need your advice on Wednesday's business, Dunham."

"My advice?" returned the young man, with interest. "Is it in the Evans case?"

"No," dryly; "it is n't in the Evans case. It 's a case of a girl." The judge scowled at his gaiters and pushed his hat askew. "Hang it, I don't know anything about girls."

The young lawyer waited, his elbows on his desk.

"Anything that I can do, of course," he said at last.

"Have you any sisters?"

"No."

"Confound you," returned the other impatiently. "What do you know about it, then?"

"Nearly all there is to know," responded Dunham modestly.

"The conventionalities, the proprieties? Where and how girls may live and where and how they can't, for instance? Unattached girls whose relatives don't want them, for I 'd like to bet her aunt won't receive her, and if I should go out of my way to urge it she 'd probably turn on me and tell me to take my own medicine."

"I 'd do my best," returned John, when the exasperated tones had subsided.

"What 's the use of obeying St. Paul if your family won't?" went on the lawyer irritably. "What 's the good of avoiding girls of your own, only to have somebody else's dumped on you?"

"Be calm, Judge," said Dunham, smiling. "I felt a

little stage fright when I thought it was the Evans case; but if it's only girls, I can attend to them with one hand tied behind me."

Judge Trent regarded him wistfully. "John, do you know what you're saying? Isn't yours the presumption of ignorance?"

"What? when I told you I had been in love a dozen times? To be sure, I never met those who've hit me hardest; but cheer up, Judge, I'll stand by you. What is it?"

"I'm not quite ready to say what it is. I'll fence with Fate by myself awhile longer." As he spoke Calvin Trent took from his pocket a letter and began to read it over once more.

"Very well," returned Dunham, picking up his papers. "I'm ready to act as your second."

The following day Miss Martha Lacey locked the door of her cottage behind her and set off for the business district of the town. Her hair was carefully arranged and her bonnet was becoming. Her neighbors were wont to say with admiration that Martha Lacey, though she did live alone and was poor in kith, kin, and worldly fortune, never lost her ambition. She kept an eye to the styles as carefully as the rosiest belle in town.

"There isn't any sense in a woman letting herself look queer," Miss Lacey often declared. "I don't mean to look queer."

"It's real sensible of Martha to do as she does," said one neighbor to the new minister's wife. "She jilted the smartest man in town when she was young and she's kept on looking the part, as you might say,

ever since. If she 'd let herself run down, kind of seedy, everybody 'd have said she was disappointed; but he has n't ever married — it 's Judge Trent, you know — and the way Martha holds her head up and wears gold eyeglasses sort of makes folks think he 'd be glad to get her any time. It 's real smart of Martha. The judge looks the seedy one. He never did carry much flesh, but now he 's dried up till he ain't much bigger 'n a grasshopper; but smart — Martha's smartness ain't to speak of beside his. They do say he 's as well known in Boston as he is here."

There was an extra determination in Miss Lacey's walk as she moved along this morning, the watery spring sunshine beaming on the well-brushed gray tailor gown she had bought ready-made at a sale a year ago. She was on her way to the law offices of Calvin Trent, a rare errand indeed and one which, if observed by acquaintances, she knew would even now "make talk;" but she did not falter, nor look to the right or left as she at last entered the dingy doorway and ascended the worn staircase.

Scarcely pausing before the black-lettered door, she walked into the anteroom, and apparently her entrance sent a communication to the inner office; for while she stood for a moment looking dubiously at the uninviting chairs, a tall young man entered the room. Miss Lacey viewed him with curiosity and surprise.

He greeted her courteously and brought forward one of the chairs. She wiped the finger of her gray glove along its edge and examined it.

"I guess you don't have ladies here much," she remarked dryly.

"Oh, is it dusty?" he returned, pulling out his handkerchief with a sudden jerk and wiping the broken cane seat.

"Here's another place;" she pointed an accusing gray finger.

Dunham obediently dusted and she lowered her person gingerly upon the chair.

"Now don't you put that dirty thing back in your pocket," she said, and the young man paused midway in the act, and finally laid the handkerchief on the gray mantelpiece.

"You don't receive many ladies here, I imagine," repeated Miss Lacey, her nostrils dilating.

"No, very few," returned Dunham, flushed. "What can I do for you, madam?"

"Nothing, I guess, except dust the chair. I'm sure I'm much obliged to you for that and I'm sorry that you took your nice handkerchief. You ought to have some soft cheesecloth here."

"I'll — mention it," said Dunham. "May I ask your business?"

"No, you may not," returned Miss Martha equably. "Is Judge Trent in?"

The young lawyer collected himself. "I represent Judge Trent," he said briefly.

"Not to me you don't, young man," rejoined the visitor coolly.

They regarded each other for a moment.

"I wish to see Judge Trent," said Martha at last.

"He is very busy; but if you will tell me the nature of" —

"Busy? So am I," returned Miss Lacey brusquely,

"and if you imagine that I am going to climb up to this office and then leave it without seeing the judge you're mistaken. You might give me something to read if he'll be long."

"Do you think you would care for Blackstone?" asked the young lawyer. "There is n't much choice here."

"I should n't mind looking at it. I've always known that a little common sense would revise the law so that a lot of this absurd red tape could be cut out."

"Then the world has been waiting for you many years; Mrs. — Mrs." —

"Not at all," returned the visitor; "I'm not Mrs. You go into the office, please, and tell Judge Trent that Miss Martha Lacey would like to see him on important business."

Dunham nodded; but his head had scarcely regained the perpendicular when the name began to impress him. "Martha." "Pizen-neat." He bit his lip, and without venturing again to meet Miss Lacey's cool, incisive gaze he turned and vanished into the inner office.

CHAPTER II

MARTHA LACEY

JUDGE TRENT was sitting at his desk scowling at his work with concentration when his assistant tiptoed to his side, his face sternly repressed and his eyes dancing.

"Miss Martha Lacey wishes to see you, Judge."

The latter looked up with such suddenness as to endanger the situation of the high hat. "Who?" he demanded.

"Sh!" advised Dunham. "Miss Martha Lacey."

Judge Trent placed his hand on his assistant's arm as he stared up at him. "I guess you got the name wrong, Boy," he returned, in a hushed tone.

The young lawyer shook his head solemnly, but his lips refused solemnity. "Miss Martha Lacey," he repeated slowly.

His senior frowned. "These offices are badly planned, Dunham, badly planned. There is no back entrance."

"Exit, do you mean?" asked the other.

"What are you doing in here?" demanded the judge sternly, but careful not to raise his voice. "It was your place to find out her business."

"That's what I thought. In fact, I told her so."

"Well, what is it, then? You go back. I empower you to act." As Judge Trent spoke he pushed his young colleague with one bony hand.

"She won't have me," gurgled Dunham in a whisper. "She's going to wait for you till the last trump, and while she's waiting she says she'll revise Blackstone."

The judge did not smile. He suddenly relaxed throughout his slight frame. "That's Martha," he replied, "you have n't made any mistake. And she'd do it. Very capable woman. Very capable woman. Dunham, I want you to understand," he continued, as he rose and straightened himself, "that I respect that lady very highly."

"Oh, I do understand," responded Dunham. "She's a bright, observant woman. She found the chairs dusty." He drew in his breath in a noiseless whistle.

The little man looked up alertly under his shaggy brows. "They *were* dusty, I dare say. You cleaned one for her, eh?"

"Yes, with my handkerchief. She did n't like it."

"Oh, no, she would n't like that. You are quite sure there'd be no use in your going back again and trying to find out what she — a — eh?"

"Are n't *you* quite sure?" Dunham stood with his feet apart and a broad grin on his countenance.

The judge rose and shook himself.

"I've got those papers ready, Dunham. It might be well for you to take them over to the office and register them; and as you pass through you may ask Miss Lacey to step in here."

John Dunham composed his countenance, took his hat and the papers, and started on his errand.

Entering the outer room, he paused before Miss Lacey to give his message, and she lifted a small paper parcel that lay in her lap.

"Don't be worried about your handkerchief," she said. "I'm going to take it home and wash it."

"Oh, I beg you won't trouble yourself," exclaimed the young man.

"I shall. You soiled it for me."

Dunham bit his lip. The query flitted through his mind as to whether Miss Lacey had ever been successfully contradicted.

"When Sir Walter Raleigh flung down his coat for a queen to walk upon, history does n't say that Elizabeth sent it to the dry-cleaners," he remarked.

"That just shows how different two old maids can act," returned Miss Lacey.

Dunham laughed and bowed. "I don't believe the difference would continue throughout," he said. "I fancy you and Queen Bess have lots of points in common."

With this he took his departure, and Martha Lacey rose and passed into the inner room where Judge Trent waited, grimly wondering at that burst of laughter which he saw reflected on his visitor's lips as she entered.

She advanced and shook hands with him. "How do you do, Calvin? That is n't any fool you 've taken into your office."

"Won't you have a chair?" offering Dunham's. "I was n't looking for a fool when I engaged him. Perhaps that explains it."

"You have your hat on, Calvin," remarked Miss Lacey, as she accepted the seat after an investigating sweep of her gloved finger.

"I beg your pardon," returned the disconcerted

lawyer, removing his hat and setting it reluctantly on his desk. Then he, too, sat down, passing his hand over his scanty locks.

"Your furniture in the next room is shockingly soiled," she went on. "Why don't you have Hannah come with some good flannel rags and tepid water and ivory soap and furniture polish?"

"It is so old, I don't believe it's worth the trouble," returned the judge pacifically.

"Well, it isn't my place to say you ought to have new; but do look at it the next time you go out there. I've come, Calvin, to see if you've heard about Sam."

Judge Trent settled his head in his neck as though bracing himself. "I learned of it yesterday, Martha. Pray accept my condolences. I should have called on you this evening."

"Excuse me," returned Miss Lacey somewhat tartly, "if I say I don't believe it; and I don't blame you, either. You know very well that there was no more love lost between my brother and me than there was between your brother-in-law and you. Sam didn't make your sister Laura happy, to my shame and sorrow. I'm the one that owes you condolences, and have any time this twenty years."

"Say ten," returned the judge concisely. "Laura's troubles have been over for nearly ten years."

"So they have, poor Laura! I used to think that it was such a beautiful thing that Sam had such an artistic temperament; but how seldom it goes with the practical! Poor Sam had just enough talent to tempt him away from a useful business life, and not enough

to make his family comfortable. How I do hope his daughter has n't inherited his happy-go-lucky, selfish nature; for there is that girl for us to deal with, Calvin." Martha Lacey flashed an anxious look at her vis-a-vis.

"Sam's girl, yes," returned the lawyer. His face had become expressionless. His shoulders had humped forward. He reminded his companion of some animal who instinctively draws itself together to avoid the enemy's detection. So a tree-toad clings against the bark. So a porcupine rolls itself into a ball. To Miss Lacey the latter simile would have been more appealing. She dreaded the arrows he could launch.

"Sam's girl, yes; but Laura's girl, too, Calvin."

"Well?" he responded non-committally, and his face and figure seemed incapable of moving a muscle.

"I could n't go 'way out to Illinois to the funeral even if I'd known in time," said Miss Lacey plaintively. "I could n't think of affording it, and I wrote Sylvia so."

"Then you have been in correspondence with her?" asked the lawyer, and his cold manner appeared to seize an advantage.

"No, I have n't," responded Martha quickly. "It was n't till Sam's life was despaired of that she wrote to me, as in duty bound. Of course I answered her; but do you believe, Calvin Trent, before my letter had time to get there — I was n't very prompt — she wrote again, and said it was all over and some friends were paying her expenses to Boston, and she'd be here on Tuesday."

Miss Lacey leaned back in her chair and looked

desperately for a sign of life in the stony countenance before her.

"Well?" responded the judge, after a pause.

"Well, what?" she retorted, in a tense voice. "I've no doubt she's as slipshod — as easy-going, I should say, as her father. The idea of her not waiting for advice from her relatives before she took such a step and came to a strange land uninvited; but she's our flesh and blood, Calvin, and she's in her teens yet. What are you going to do about it?"

Judge Trent was humped over more defensively than ever. Miss Lacey's nervous tension could not endure the prolonging of the silence with which he met the question.

"No doubt it comes suddenly on you, Calvin. Still, you say you heard of Sam's death. Did Sylvia write you?"

"Yes."

"Did she tell you she was coming to Boston?"

"Yes."

"Have you got an idea in this world, Calvin Trent, what she's going to do?"

"No, have you?"

It was something to have won a question from him. Miss Martha stirred in her chair.

"No, I have n't. It is easy to see how her friends thought it would be cheapest to pay her fare here and get her off their hands. Now I thought I'd go to Boston Wednesday morning instead of sending for her to come here, for if she once gets in here it'll be every one's business to nose into our affairs and have something to say." Miss Lacey paused a moment and then added

boldly: "And I thought if you would go with me, we could find out just what she has to live on, if anything, and whether she has any plans."

The humped-over figure continued to gaze silently into space.

"It would be hypocrisy for me to say I have any affection for an absolute stranger just because she happens to be the child of a brother who never was any comfort to me in this world. With you it may be different," continued Miss Lacey, with what she intended to be adroitness. "Laura was a dear little thing, and you loved her, and this is her child."

Another pause. It was doubtful what thoughts were behind Judge Trent's half-closed eyes.

"My affairs are n't any more brilliant and promising as the years go by," pursued Miss Lacey. "You know as well as I do what condition I 'm in to adopt Sam's girl."

She suddenly dashed some bright drops from her lashes. Indignant tears they were, brought there by the apparent futility of her appeals.

"By the way," said the judge slowly, "that visit of condolence I was intending to make on you was to be one of congratulation as well."

Martha paused, her handkerchief poised in air.

"Yes; that unfortunate investment of yours turned out all right after all. At least I secured your principal for you."

The surprised, glad color came into Martha's face. "How in the world did you manage that, Calvin!" she ejaculated.

"I 'll send you the papers and cash very soon."

"I don't know how to thank you. I really don't," stammered the visitor.

She had been very angry with her erstwhile lover a minute ago. The revulsion of feeling bewildered her.

The judge rose, and she found herself following his example.

"You have n't told me a word what your judgment is about the girl," she said, rather pitifully.

He nodded. "Your judgment will be the best. A woman is worth two men in such a case. Carry out your plan, Martha. Interview her, and then we 'll see — we 'll see."

He held open the office door for his visitor to pass out, and woman-like her memory flew back. It seemed but yesterday that this man was hanging on her looks, pleading for her love.

A fleeting glance at his expressionless face as he waited for her to pass him was enough. Again her eyes swept the dingy anteroom. "Good-by, Calvin, it 's been a relief to talk to you," she said.

They shook hands. "If I 'd married him," thought Miss Lacey, "that room would n't look like that."

The judge softly closed the door behind her. "There, but for the grace of God," he murmured devoutly, "goes Mrs. Calvin Trent." Then he returned to his desk, put on his hat, and sat down at his work.

Before long Dunham returned. His employer beckoned him with a long, bony finger.

The young man's eyes glistened, and he tiptoed forward obediently.

"What 's the matter with you?" uneasily. "She — the lady has gone?"

"Certainly, Judge. I saw her just now disappearing up the street."

"Well, listen. I have decided not to go to Boston Wednesday morning. You will go in my place."

"Yes?"

"Miss Lacey is going on the same train."

"Ah," Dunham nodded slowly and with becoming gravity.

"You will have a seat in the parlor car. She will not have. Martha would think that nonsense; but her errand will be at the same place as yours. My sister married her brother. Both are dead, and they have left a daughter who has come out of the West to Boston to seek us. I suspect there may be a good deal of wool clinging to her."

"A lamb, of course," murmured Dunham.

"The disposition of this girl is costing Miss Lacey considerable worry, and me quite as much, although I don't think best to let Martha know it. I intended to go to the hotel to meet her myself; but"—

The younger man smiled, and the judge saw that he understood.

"I shall prepare some memoranda for you. What I am ready to buy is peace. You understand? You will be cautious, and not let me in for anything except perhaps immediate expenses. Follow Miss Lacey's lead; but let her lead. Eh?"

"Certainly, Judge Trent. As I said before, I can manage this with one hand tied behind me. It is n't as if it were the Evans case."

"The Evans case!" Judge Trent growled scornfully. "The Evans case is a bagatelle to this. Now you see

to it that you 're wise as a serpent in this matter. First and foremostly, and last and lastly, I won't have that girl in my house. Understand?"

"Oh, surely. I understand."

"Let Miss Lacey make the decisions and you be cautious."

"Ay, ay, Judge," returned Dunham airily.

CHAPTER III

A RAILWAY TRIP

THE speculator on a large scale feels no more elated over the rescue of a fortune from anticipated loss than did Miss Lacey in the recovery of her one thousand dollars. In the expansion of ideas which it caused she determined to celebrate by taking a chair in the parlor car for Boston on Wednesday morning.

John Dunham boarded the train just as it was pulling out of the station, and as he approached his seat suddenly heard himself greeted: —

"It *is* Sir Walter," said a pleased voice. "I was n't sure till you took your hat off."

The young man paused in the act of hanging up his hat and looked down upon the occupant of the next chair. She was regarding him with interest.

"Why, good-morning, Miss Lacey," he responded, and perhaps his smile would not have been so pronounced but for the quick consideration of Judge Trent's situation had he not transferred his ticket this morning.

Dunham even wondered if Miss Lacey might not have learned in some way who it was that had engaged this chair and made her arrangements accordingly. However, the surprise with which she recognized him was certainly genuine.

"Are n't these seats comfortable?" she went on as he sank into his. "I never traveled in one before. I 'm just being reckless this morning."

Her triumphant, half-defiant regard did not indicate that she was laboring under any disappointment.

Upon Dunham's acquiescence she continued: "Perhaps, being in the office, you know about my windfall?"

"I had n't heard, but I 'm glad there was a windfall."

Miss Martha scrutinized the speaker's countenance approvingly. "He 's about as pleasant-looking a man as I ever laid eyes on," she thought.

"It is n't exactly a windfall, because it's only my own come back to me; but it 's money I never expected to see again, and if Cal — if Judge Trent was n't a good deal smarter than the average I never should have, either."

"Not many people can get ahead of him," returned Dunham.

"I guess not," said Miss Lacey, and she bridled proudly in a manner not lost upon her neighbor. "So I just said to myself this morning, 'What 's the use of always being so careful?' Said I, 'I believe I 'll see for once how it feels to go to Boston like a nabob.'"

Dunham smiled and nodded, perceiving that Miss Martha felt that her extravagance must be explained even if it could not be justified.

The extra alertness of her look suffered a slight cloud as she continued: "One thing that made me feel reckless was that affairs are taking a turn that may make me be more careful and more economical than I ever was before, and I just thought before I found out I 'd have one good time!"

As she finished, the defiant expression returned, and she cast a glance at her companion which seemed to challenge his disapproval. "I notice you don't — I notice lots of folks don't mind the extravagance."

"Ah, but Judge Trent pays my expenses, you see."

Miss Lacey drew herself up under the smiling regard. "He came very near paying mine," was her unspoken thought, and she would have been astonished to know how close her companion came to reading it.

"Of course that makes a difference," she returned, and she regarded her neighbor curiously, wishing she knew just what his business arrangement was with the judge.

"And I would have known, too, if I'd married him," she thought.

Dunham had been handling a magazine, watching for the moment when he could open it; but gaining more and more the impression that Miss Lacey felt his companionship to be a perquisite which rendered more reasonable the price of her chair, he dropped the periodical in his lap.

"Well, for my part, Miss Lacey," he said, leaning his head back definitely, "I think some well-distributed extravagance is n't so disreputable."

"Perhaps not," she returned, "but if you were a lone spinster without a bank account you might have your doubtful moments."

There was a hint of childlike excitement in the speaker's manner which Dunham found rather touching.

"Don't pretend to me that you ever have doubtful moments," he said, regarding the alert face with curi-

osity as to how it had appeared in those days when Judge Trent had wanted "just that one girl."

"My!" exclaimed Miss Lacey. "I'm having a doubtful moment right now; not one, but dozens! I'm on the most ticklish errand of my life. That's what I called on Judge Trent about the other day."

"That's right," commented Dunham gravely. "Never move without legal advice."

"And if I'd had any idea I was going to meet *you*, I'd have brought your handkerchief. I've done it up as smooth as satin."

"How good of you!"

"And it's pretty near as fine as satin, too; and that worked monogram is a beauty; but it's lucky you're a lawyer, for it would take one to figure out what the letters are; — but you need n't tell your sweetheart I said so."

Dunham laughed. "I won't. It would break her heart."

"Don't you ever wipe off chairs with it again. It's wicked," declared Miss Lacey emphatically.

"Then don't you ever come into the office and give me heart failure by your unkind comments."

"I don't know as I ever shall," returned Miss Lacey, suddenly pensive and looking into space. "The other day I was clear out of Judge Trent's office and into the street, and it was too late to go back, before I realized that I'd scarcely got three words from him that were really definite or any use to me. Has he mentioned to you anything about a niece of his who has come to Boston? I suppose he has n't."

"Yes, he has."

"Indeed? Well, she's mine, too, and this minute I'm on my way to see her." Miss Lacey made the declaration impressively. "He ought to be here himself. But I won't shirk my duty if he does his. She's come clear from Illinois, and I don't know what for. I wish I was like some folks and could let her shift for herself; but she is n't twenty yet, and I have n't got the heart. I have n't been smart, I saw that afterward; for if I'd gone to Judge Trent and just said I was too poor to do anything for Sylvia and stuck to it, and carried matters with a high hand and told him I was n't going near her, he'd have had to. I see that as plain as day now, but he came at me with the good news about my money, and kind of sidled me toward the door, and while I was gasping and trying to realize it, the first thing I knew I was downstairs."

Dunham received her injured look with a nod as she paused.

"I live all alone," she went on, and John wondered who then customarily received her flow of conversation; "and all this sudden business is a great disturbance to me. I've laid awake over the matter, and prayed over it, and here I am, not knowing yet what I'm going to do."

She fell silent. She could not tell this stranger that it was the ne'er-do-well character of her only brother which caused her panic at the mere hint of taking the responsibility of his daughter, many years motherless and the companion of his wholly slipshod methods of life. In years past Calvin Trent had been wont to say it was like pouring water into a sieve to endeavor to help Sam Lacey.

While Miss Martha was indulging in a résumé of the dismal situation her companion took a folded memorandum from an inside pocket and scanned it.

"Girl at Hotel Frisbie.

"Name Sylvia Lacey.

"Age nineteen.

"Her mother, my sister, dead for ten years.

"Her father, recently deceased, an alleged artist, a rolling stone and a scapegrace all his life.

"Be present at interview between Miss Martha Lacey and the girl.

"Let Miss Martha take the lead."

There were a few further instructions, but Miss Lacey here broke in upon the reading.

"I'm going to ask you to do one more gallant thing for me, Sir Walter."

"I'm ready."

"Put me on the right car for Hotel Frisbie. The Boston street-cars are a hopeless muddle to me, — always were and always will be."

"I'll escort you to the hotel."

"Oh, that's too kind!" exclaimed Miss Martha. "I'm not quite *non compos*. I can get out all right. It's the getting *in* that's the puzzle."

"But I have to go there myself. Judge Trent thought you might need a lieutenant. He has sent me to help you."

The color rushed to Miss Martha's face. Calvin was thinking of her, after all. Her eyes glistened with sudden hope.

"What is he willing to do?" she demanded.

"Nothing — that is, very little," responded Dunham hastily. "You, I suppose, are acquainted with this young lady?"

"Indeed I'm not!" Miss Martha repudiated the charge with energy. "And I'm not nearly as well able to help her as Calvin is. So he sent you. He has a conscience about it, after all. I don't suppose he'd consent to her living with him?"

"Not for one moment," returned Dunham quickly. "Whatever course you consider, that idea must be dismissed."

"Whatever course I consider," repeated Miss Lacey bitterly. "Judge Trent has no business to leave all the considering to me. It's cowardly, and it's mean, and I don't care one bit if you tell him I said so!"

"I shan't," returned Dunham. "He has sent me. He is prepared to do something, anything in reason that you think best."

After this Miss Lacey's problem descended heavily upon her, and she averted her head and looked gloomily at the flying landscape; so Dunham opened his magazine and read until they reached Boston.

CHAPTER IV

HOTEL FRISBIE

THE Frisbie being a commercial house in a crowded business centre, Miss Lacey was glad of Dunham's safe conduct amid clanging bells and interlacing traffic wagons. She followed him through the dark hall of the hotel and into an elevator. Leaving this, they entered the depressing stretches of a long parlor whose stiff furniture and hangings clung drearily against a harassing wall paper as dingy as themselves. Finding the room empty, Miss Lacey began to speak excitedly as soon as they were seated and Dunham had sent the bell-boy on his errand.

"Exactly the sort of a hotel my brother Sam would have come to!" she said. "I wondered why Sylvia chose it. Like as not he 's brought her here before."

Then her lips snapped together, for she remembered she was not going to speak slightingly of her brother before a stranger.

"Too bad he was not the sort of man with whom you and Judge Trent could have been in sympathy," replied Dunham civilly. "It would have made the present situation easier."

"Then Calvin has told you about it," returned Miss Martha, with mingled relief and resentment, "and you understand why we can't feel anything except a painful

duty in this matter. If Sylvia had stayed West like a reasonable being, instead of rushing on to Boston without our permission, we would have helped her what we could — at least the judge would. It would have been a great deal simpler to send a little money to Springfield, Illinois, than to have the worry of the girl right here with us — neither of us wanting her, — we could n't be expected to." Miss Lacey's tongue was loosened now and all reserves broken down. "I'm not in a position to assume the care of anybody, and as for Judge Trent, you know how set and peculiar he is, and besides that, my brother always made his wife perfectly miserable" —

"It's a lie!"

Miss Lacey sank back in her chair and Dunham sprang to his feet as the girlish voice rang out, and a black-clothed figure stood before them. She had been standing behind one of the heavy hangings watching the passing in the seething street when the two entered the room, and until now had listened tense and motionless.

For a silent moment the visitors faced the girl, whose crop of short, curly hair vibrated, and whose eyes sent forth sparks of blue fire as she stood there, indignation incarnate. Her glance roved from one to the other, and Miss Martha pinched herself to make certain that she had not fallen into a bad dream, while Dunham crimsoned under the burning gaze.

"Syl — Sylvia, is that you!" exclaimed Miss Lacey unsteadily.

The girl scorned to reply. White and accusing she stood. Miss Martha looked up at her companion

appealingly. "Mr. — Mr. — Sir Walter — Oh, I don't know your name!"

The young girl half closed her eyes and looked down on her aunt with a strange expression.

"Do you," she asked slowly, "talk like that about your dead brother even to persons whose names you have n't learned?"

"Great Scott!" thought Dunham, whose crimson was fast becoming prickly heat. "What have I got into!"

"I know this gentleman — I do, Sylvia," returned Miss Martha earnestly. "He is your Uncle Calvin's — yes, your Uncle Calvin's trusted friend."

"I should judge so," returned the girl, fixing the unhappy Dunham with her gaze. "I should judge his position to be very nearly one of the family. Does Uncle Calvin know his name?"

Dunham had for some years been aware that his height was six feet. Now he appeared to himself to be shrinking together until he was twin to his employer. It would be a fortunate moment to present his card to these ladies! For the first time in his life he found his hands in his way.

"The situation is very peculiar — very," stammered Miss Martha nervously, "and I'm very sorry, very sorry indeed that you were listening."

"Oh, so am I!" ejaculated the girl, the angry tenseness of her face changing and her voice breaking as she threw up her hands in a despairing gesture. The pathos of the black figure struck through Dunham's mortification.

"I would n't have hurt your feelings for anything," pursued Miss Martha earnestly.

"Would n't you?"

"No; and I wish you would believe it and not look at me so strangely. I never had hysterics in my life, but I feel as if I might have them right off, if you don't stop."

The young girl had regained her self-control. "It might be the best ending to the interview," she said, "for I could leave you then to — to the trusted friend. I don't know what to do now." She clasped her hands over her face for a second, then dropped them.

"She 's dreadfully theatrical, dreadfully," thought Miss Lacey.

"She is broken-hearted," thought Dunham; and pulling himself together he found his voice.

"My name is Dunham, Miss Lacey," he said, meeting the blue eyes where the fire had burned out, showing the face so white, so young. "This is in the day's work for me, and I'm sorry. I am in Judge Trent's office, and he sent me here with your aunt to represent him."

"My aunt saved a lot of time," rejoined the girl slowly, speaking low. "She represented them both while I stood there behind the curtain." Her hands pressed together, and she looked again from one to the other.

"There is n't anything for you to stay for now, is there?" she added, after a painful silence.

"Why, of course there is!" exclaimed Miss Martha. "We have n't made any plan at all."

"What plan had you thought of making?"

Miss Martha cleared her throat and looked up at Dunham.

"I — we — wanted to ask what your plans were."

"They're nothing to you, I'm sure," returned the girl.

"Why, they're a great deal to us. You must n't think Judge Trent and I don't feel any responsibility of you. We *do*."

The girl's lips quivered into something that tried to be a smile.

"How did you intend to show it before — before you came in here this morning?"

"Why, we" — Miss Martha cleared her throat again, "we — feel sure, of course, that — unless your father left you money you — you will want to find something to do, and we intend to help you find it."

Sylvia looked like a pale flower as she stood there. There rose in Dunham the involuntary desire to protect that any man who saw her would have felt.

"And to pay your expenses until you do find it," he added hastily. "That is Judge Trent's idea," he declared, in a recklessly encouraging tone. "To pay your expenses so long as you need it."

The girl's quivering smile grew steadier. Her pride stiffened under this man's regard.

"Where?" she asked, with self-possession. "Not at the Touraine, probably."

It was like a downward jerk on a balloon. Dunham suddenly remembered the memoranda and his employer's shaggy gaze.

"At the Young Women's Christian Association," he replied apologetically.

The girl laughed. "I don't like the sound of it," she said. "Is it some sort of reformatory?"

"It is not," replied Miss Martha warmly. "That is

a very good idea of your uncle's. I had n't heard of it. It is a very generous and proper arrangement," with growing conviction. "Boston is dreadfully overcrowded, and you 'd have probably done better in Springfield, whatever it 's like; but I 'll stay with you now," — Miss Martha began taking off her gloves nervously, — "and help you pack up and take you over to the Association, and see you settled. The superintendent can no doubt help you to find something to do, and perhaps everything will be all right, after all."

Sylvia Lacey stretched out her hand. "Put those gloves on again, Aunt Martha. Your duty to me is done. You and Mr. Dunham can go home now."

Miss Martha's eyes snapped behind her glasses. "What do you mean? What are you going to do, then?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders carelessly. "Any one of half a dozen things. Get married, probably."

Miss Martha stared. "Are you engaged all this time and we worrying ourselves like this?"

"No, but a man, an actor, wants me to marry him. He believes I would do well on the stage."

"Sylvia Lacey, you *must n't* marry an actor. You must n't consider such a thing!" The speaker sprang to her feet and took a step forward.

"I have n't until now," — Sylvia's white cheeks gave the lie to her nonchalant tone, — "but father said he believed Nat would be good to me. I thought it very strange at the time, but he seemed much more certain that Nat would be kind than that you and Uncle Calvin would."

"Sylvia, you must n't be willful. You 're a young

girl. You must let your uncle and me think for you. I am going to remain with you until I see you moved. You can't stay in this hotel alone, not a day." Miss Martha glanced about as if she expected to see some of her brother's disreputable friends leap up from behind the stuffy old armchairs.

"Go at once, please," returned the girl. "Won't you take her?" suddenly turning to Dunham appealingly. "I'm very tired."

He did not need to be convinced of it. The white face showed the nervous strain. He believed the short curls meant some recent illness. He wished himself a thousand miles away, and took a final grip on the hat he was holding.

"We're unwilling to leave you in such uncertainty," he said lamely.

Sylvia's eyes rested on his.

"Tell Uncle Calvin" — she paused, for her throat filled — "no," she added with difficulty, "just go, please."

"Sylvia, I beg of you," Miss Lacey came forward, face and voice perturbed, and attempted to take her niece's hand.

Sylvia fell back a step. "You said everything a few minutes ago, Aunt Martha. Nothing could make any difference now. Good-by. Go, or else I must."

"Why, it's impossible, it's unheard of!" Tears sprang to Miss Martha's eyes, but Dunham took her arm and led her to the door, and while a sob of anxiety struggled in her breast he hurried her to the elevator and out upon the street, and at once hailed an approaching car.

"Do you wish to go right to the station, or to do errands?" he asked.

"Oh, *errands!*" exclaimed Miss Lacey wildly. "Who could think of errands!"

"Well, this car will take you to the station. I have some business to attend to, but shall probably catch the same train you do."

The car stopped. Dunham helped his bewildered companion to enter, and stepping back to the sidewalk, walked half a block in the opposite direction with business-like haste. Then he turned on his heel, observed that no stoppage in the street had detained Miss Martha's noisy conveyance, and striding back to the hotel, he reëntered the dingy elevator.

He knew that there could scarcely be a more deserted, isolated spot at this hour of the day than the parlor of the old hotel; and it was as he hoped. The girl had not left it. He descried the slender black figure at once. She was clinging hopelessly with both hands to one of the sodden hangings and sobbing into its heavy folds.

He went up to her. "Pardon me. I've come back. Please don't do that."

She lifted her swollen eyes in surprise for a moment and then hid them.

"What right have you!" she murmured.

"None, but I could n't do anything else, of course. You can see that. Come over here and sit down, please. Somebody might come in."

The girl controlled her sobs; but kept her face hidden. "I don't want to talk to you," she gasped.

"I know you don't. It makes it rather awkward. Is

there any one else in Boston — any one I could go and bring to you?"

She rubbed her soft little curls into the aged hangings in a hopeless negative.

"Say!" said Dunham, in acute protest, "would you mind taking your head out of that curtain? Why, it might give you typhoid fever."

"I've just had it," replied the girl chokingly. "That's why I'm so weak and — and — Oh, if I could just telegraph to Nat!"

"If you'll come out of the curtain I'll wire Nat," responded Dunham eagerly, — "that is, if it's the best thing," he added doubtfully.

"You can't wire him. He's one-nighting. I don't know where to catch him, and he could n't come anyway."

John continued to regard her as she left her hold on the curtain and pressed a wet handkerchief to her eyes. "Come over here and sit down one minute, please. I won't stay long."

She followed reluctantly to the chair he placed. "You should n't stay at all," she returned. "I don't wish to trouble a perfect stranger with my woes, and except for Uncle Calvin you have no reason to be here, and — and I have n't any uncle any more."

It was pitiful to see her effort to control the pretty, grieving lips. Her soul was smarting with the shock of her discovery, and the mortification of this stranger's knowledge of it. She wished to send him out of her sight at once; but her voice failed.

"Now, I'm neither Aunt Martha nor Uncle Calvin," said John, "and I refuse to be treated as if I were. If

you have n't any friends in Boston I'm sure you can make one of me for five minutes. The situation is awkward enough, and you might feel for me a bit, eh?"

"No, not if you have come to try to persuade me to do anything. Nat — Mr. Forsyth, says he is sure I could get a chance on the stage, and — and he says it would make everything easier if I married him; but my friends at home urged me so much, and said the stage was a dog's life, and persuaded me that my own people were the ones to help me now. My own people!" the speaker pressed the handkerchief to her unsteady lips again, and her eyes swam afresh.

Dunham regarded her. Of course she could get a position on the stage. Any creature so pretty always could. He pictured her in some chorus, these quivering lips reddened and the swimming eyes laughing in the shade of an outrageous hat.

"I should say the stage last myself," he returned. "Your own people *are* the ones. Your Uncle Calvin" —

"I have n't any."

"Well, Judge Trent, then, is what is popularly described as a dried-up old bachelor. It never occurred to him that happiness might be — that he might find a daughter in you; but he wants to do his duty by you — indeed he does," for the girl's face was discouraging, "and, by George, you ought to let him do it."

"Never! And I always bade his picture good-night. Mother loved him so, and she taught me." The last word was inaudible.

Dunham leaned forward with his hands on his knees. "Now would you mind telling me, since you

have n't any one else to tell, how much money you have?"

A little determined shake of the curls. "I should n't think of telling you."

"Then you 're a very foolish girl. You ought to have more head and not so much heart in this affair. Judge Trent is a man whom any one might be proud to claim, and if you won't behave childishly we can bring him around all right."

"Do you think I 'd stoop to bring him around?" she asked, with a moist flash of the eyes.

"You would n't be the first who stooped to conquer. If you were clever you would."

"Father thought I was clever, and so does Nat," she said, with feeble resentment.

"They would n't if they knew what you are doing now. Just because a busy old bachelor of a lawyer, immersed in hard-headed affairs, does n't throw all aside and come here to welcome you and behave like a family man, you repudiate him altogether."

"She said they did n't either of them want me." The voice was a wail.

"But you were n't anything to them but a name."

"I 'm their own flesh and blood."

"Yes, and see that you don't forget it. You have a claim upon them. Now at best it must be some days before you can communicate with your — friend, perhaps I ought to say your lover."

"Oh, no, don't," with faint dissent. "He 's father's friend, really, and he 's — poor thing, he 's so fat I don't think he 'd call himself anybody's lover; but he 's so kind. He was so good to father."

This time the speaker did not vanish into the handkerchief, but caught her lip between her little teeth, and looking away, struggled for composure in a way that drew on John's heartstrings.

This slender creature, not yet strong from the illness that had crowned her head with those silky tendrils, and with no supporting arm save that of a barn-storming actor, mediocre in his middle age, what was Judge Trent's representative to do or say to prevent her from taking some foolish and desperate course!

"Now you simply must have money to tide you over," he announced. "Let's not have any nonsense. You can't knock about this hotel. Judge Trent knew what he was doing when he said the Young Women's Christian Association. He wanted you guarded, and he was n't — he did n't — he could n't very well guard you himself." Dunham stammered, but collected himself with praiseworthy dignity. He had recalled his six feet of height, and rising, began to make the most of the last inch, and to try the effect of a frown down on the flower face whose eyes, looking a little startled, encouraged him. He frowned more heavily as he took a bill book from his pocket and counted out five five-dollar bills.

"Now take that money and put it away in some safe place," he said briefly. "I'll take you over to the Association myself. No, indeed, I'm not Aunt Martha, and you're going with me."

The girl let the bills drop into her lap while she drew her hands away from them.

"I'd rather go and jump into the water!" she began passionately.

"Don't — be — *silly!*" returned Dunham, in a biting, big-brother tone which seemed to have an effect.

"Is this Uncle Calvin's money?"

"Of course it is. What would your mother say if she were here? Of course I understand you 're not going to be dependent upon Judge Trent. You 've made up your mind to that, and I'm not going to try to shake you; but I suppose you 're not so childish as to refuse a small gift from your mother's brother, just because you 're disappointed in him, or angry with him — or whatever you choose to call it. I'm rather pressed for time," continued John, after a short pause, assuming the tone he reserved for a book agent on his busy day, and taking out his watch he gave it a sweeping glance. "It would oblige me very much if you could hurry a little. You can't stay here, you know, and I'll have a carriage ready."

Sylvia rose undecidedly. "You take a great deal for granted," she said. "I — there 's only one condition on which I'll go, and that is that you don't tell either my uncle or my aunt where I am. I will not see them. I'll have no more of their sense of duty! I won't have Aunt Martha come back there."

"Oh, very well," Dunham gave a hasty and rather bored nod.

"But do you promise?" The blue eyes began to dry and to sparkle again.

"Well, yes, of course. I promise."

She left the room; and the various shades of dignity, sarcasm, and boredom gradually vanished from the young man's countenance. He smiled and shrugged his big shoulders with the gesture of a ten-year-old

schoolboy, and moving over to a hoary mirror with a freckled gilt frame, he executed a brief and silent clog before it.

"I'm not so bad," he commented to his reflection. "Nat is n't the only star in the profession."

CHAPTER V

JUDGE TRENT'S STUDY

DUNHAM took care not to see Miss Lacey again until their train was nearing its destination. Then as he approached the seat where she gazed out the car window he observed that her eyes bore traces of tears.

She gave a nervous start as she recognized him.

"Oh, there you are. I've been afraid you missed the train. I'm very glad you've come, for I'm going straight to Judge Trent's office with you, Mr. Dunham."

"Oh, are you?" responded the young man dubiously. He seemed to see his employer's warning glance. "I rather think Judge Trent will have gone home. It's pretty late."

"Very well," returned Miss Lacey decisively, "then we go on to his house. This is no time to stand on ceremony. Every moment counts."

Whatever was in her mind her companion saw that she had worked herself to a pitch of excitement which made a railroad train no fitting environment for its expression; and to avoid further conversation he moved to the door and stood looking through the glass, meditating upon the approaching interview.

The station reached, Miss Lacey waited while Dunham telephoned to the office. There was no reply.

"The judge has evidently gone home," he said, returning to anxious Miss Martha.

"Then, as I told you," she answered, with firmness, "I am going to his house."

She had turned this possibility over in her mind several times. The long spring day was bright. Neighbors would observe her and comment upon her action, and she was not indifferent to this.

It did not occur to Dunham that she might consider the present situation an ordeal, but he was certain of Judge Trent's frame of mind, and he felt it incumbent upon him to do what he could.

"Shan't I put you on the car for home, Miss Lacey?" he asked persuasively, "and bring Judge Trent to see you?"

"It would be very nice if you could," she returned briefly, "but you could n't."

"Oh, I assure you," — began John smoothly.

Miss Lacey emitted a sort of impatient groan. "Don't talk," she exclaimed brusquely. "You don't know anything about it. He 'll go on shirking just the way he 's begun if I give him the chance. Is n't that the car coming? Oh, no, it is n't!"

"Probably you 'd rather see him alone," suggested John, seizing upon a sudden hope. "Being so essentially a family matter and — eh — don't you think?"

"No, I don't think!" returned Miss Lacey. "If I 'd had my way it *would* have been a family matter. Calvin and I ought to have attended to it entirely alone; but he *would* drag you into it — yes, I know it 's very uncomfortable for you, but you *are* in, and I need you

for a witness and to back me up, and you must come, Mr. Dunham; there 's the car now."

John yielded to the inevitable. He remembered grimly one item of his memoranda. "Follow Miss Lacey's lead."

Whatever of humor was in the situation was in abeyance. He had an irritating consciousness that what should have been the problem of these people had been shifted upon himself in a manner most unfair of Fortune. The desolate face that he had left haunted his thoughts; and the girl's pride and obstinacy in binding him to secrecy made the coming interview awkward.

Judge Trent, all unsuspicious, was sitting in his study. He had slipped on the dressing-gown with the indistinguishable pattern, and the rusty slippers that his soul loved. His silk hat formed a shadow for his eyes, and his big table was covered with a riot of books and papers.

At the moment chosen by his visitors for their entrance, the down-trodden heels were also resting on the table as the judge leaned back luxuriously in his desk chair and read the Boston papers.

Miss Lacey declined to allow Hannah to announce their visit.

"He might get out some back way," she declared to Dunham in a nervous undertone. She had outraged the proprieties by coming, as she read in the disapproving puckers around the old housekeeper's mouth. She was not going now to have the name without the game.

The library door opened.

Judge Trent looked up vaguely, then frowningly, then brought down his feet with a start.

"Good-evening," said Dunham; "we have come back."

Unexpected as was the sight of Miss Lacey in his sanctum, Judge Trent's astonishment was merged in the apprehension of what might be beyond. He looked over her shoulder with startled eyes as he arose.

Miss Martha understood. "No, indeed," she exclaimed, "she is n't here."

The host breathed a sigh of relief, and his sharp eyes began to question Dunham while he collected himself sufficiently to bring forward a chair for the lady.

"You honor me, Mar — Miss Lacey," he said.

"Thank you — Judge Trent," she returned, and giving his figure a comprehensive glance from top to toe, she touched her bonnet significantly as she sat down.

He did not observe the gesture. "Well," he said, resuming his seat and waving Dunham to another, "so you have come to tell me of your success. Very kind of you."

The speaker's endeavor to be courteous was offset by an impatient drumming of his fingers on the desk and the drawing together of his brows.

Martha ignored the signs. Let him drum. Let him scowl. "No," she returned impressively, "we have come to tell you of our failure."

Her manner was trying. It irritated her host still further. "How so?" he demanded.

She measured him with a severe gaze. "Calvin, you are wearing your hat," she announced frigidly.

"Eh? Oh! Pardon me." With hasty discomfiture the lawyer deposited his boon companion on the table.

"Oh! not in all that dust!" implored Miss Lacey.

He blew the vicinity vaguely. "Hannah does n't do her duty by you!" she continued.

"Thank heaven, no," responded the judge devoutly.

Dunham was choking as quietly as possible by the mantelpiece, where he had remained standing despite his host's invitation.

"Say on, Mar—Miss Lacey," said the lawyer. "Do you mean you did n't find the girl? Make it short, please. Come to the point."

Miss Lacey's spirit arose. A human soul was involved, and no man, be he lawyer or lover, should browbeat or persuade her.

"Judge Trent," she began emphatically, fixing him with eyes which he but now perceived were swollen, "don't think to hurry me. I've come here on serious business. Men call you an eminent lawyer, a brilliant man. Now we 'll see if you are sufficiently able to save your only sister's only child from an awful future."

Miss Lacey paused with working lips. Judge Trent perceived that she was deeply moved, and not endeavoring to make the most of an enjoyable situation. He pushed up his spectacles and looked questioningly at Dunham.

"You would n't come," pursued Miss Martha accusingly; "you would n't help me."

"I sent Dunham with full power."

"What could he do?" retorted Miss Lacey, in grief. "A mere boy like him, and no relation. Of course, after

I had made a complete mess of it, what was left for him to do when she turned us out, but to come back with me?"

"You told me to follow Miss Lacey's lead," stated Dunham.

"Your place was there, Calvin. You might have saved the day even after my blunder."

"Perhaps you will tell me what blunder."

"Why, she was in the parlor curtains, Sylvia was, when we went in," Martha's voice trembled, "and I don't suppose, to be fair, that she thought of eavesdropping."

"No," put in Dunham feelingly, "I've no doubt she was watching for you; and I can imagine how eager and — and different her face looked then." His reminiscent tone was earnest, and his employer regarded him with sudden sharpness.

"So she's pretty," he said dryly.

"Oh, indeed she is — or would be if she was painted up the way they do," groaned Miss Martha. "She's too pale — but that might have been all anger."

"No," said Dunham quickly, "she's had typhoid fever."

Miss Lacey stared at him. "How do you know that?" she demanded.

"Why — why — of course," stammered John, "her short curly hair meant that. Didn't you think of it at once?"

"That's an absurd conclusion," returned Miss Martha, while Judge Trent quietly regarded the young man's flushing countenance.

"But if it should be true, Calvin," continued the lady

miserably, "she's not fit yet to go to work at anything! I have n't told you yet. I talked right out to Mr. Dunham in that parlor about our not wanting her, you and I; and how we wished she'd stayed West. Oh, I've gone over it dozens of times since, and it keeps growing worse. Every word I said was true, and it was perfectly compatible with our intention to help her all the time; but she could n't realize that, and I was just sort of explaining to Mr. Dunham your coolness in the matter by telling him how miserable Sam made Laura when the girl jumped out of those curtains like a — like a perfect fury, did n't she, Mr. Dunham?"

He nodded. "She seemed at a white heat with righteous indignation," he agreed.

Miss Martha took up the tale.

"Then she began to score us all, Calvin, and perhaps *you* could have fixed it, but she simply froze me and my apologies; and then that child positively told us to go. I tried to stand my ground, and Mr. Dunham came out with your good sensible offer to send her to the Young Women's Christian Association, and I tried my best to persuade her to let me take her over there; but she laughed us to scorn, or smiled scorn, anyway; but I would not leave her until she told me what she was going to do — and what do you think it is, that your niece, Judge Trent's niece, proposes to do? She proposes to go on the stage," finished Miss Martha, in a hollow voice, — "to go on the stage and marry an actor; an actor named Nat!"

"Fat and middle-aged and mediocre," added Dunham.

Miss Lacey turned on him quickly. "Sylvia did n't say a word about his being fat and middle-aged!" she

declared severely. "Are you presuming to make fun of this situation, Mr. Dunham?"

Judge Trent's keen gaze again noted the crimsoning ears of his assistant.

"Why — why, of course I would n't do that, Miss Lacey," blurted out the young man. "Did n't you notice what she said about his being her father's friend? What else could he be but middle-aged, and probably fat?"

"Well, we don't need to call on our imagination for anything," said Miss Martha coldly. "The facts are sufficient." She turned back to Judge Trent.

"So there 's that young creature, Calvin, our own flesh and blood, alone in that rattle-te-banging city, without money for all we know, going to pin her faith to an actor man, and each of us with our homes, closed against her, as she feels, and you know we *did* feel so, too, Calvin; and when I put myself in her place and remember the things she heard me say, I don't blame her for refusing our advice and help. She 's young and high-strung, and oh, I've made such a mess of it, and, — and, — *say* something, Calvin Trent!" Miss Lacey made the addition so explosively that the judge jumped. "Say you 'll send some of your detectives to keep watch of her — quick — to-morrow — before she has a chance to get away from that hotel and get lost to us!"

Martha suddenly raised her clasped hands to her face, and burying her eyes in her handkerchief, wept miserably.

Judge Trent cleared his throat, and Dunham stirred and felt his knowledge weigh upon him guiltily.

"Don't get nervous, Martha," returned the lawyer.

"Did you think I kept a brace of detectives in the back yard? I'm sorry about this. I'm"—

Miss Lacey emerged from the handkerchief as suddenly as she had entered it. "Oh, the mistake I made — the minute I saw you would n't do your part in this — the mistake I made not to ask Thinkright. I never thought of him; but it came to me on the cars that he would have been the right one. I suppose you 'd have consented easily enough that Sylvia should go to the farm; and now — Oh, Mr. Dunham, I can't forgive you for putting that typhoid fever idea into my head, but if she did have" —

"A farm?" interrupted Dunham quickly, with an interest not lost upon his employer. "A farm would have been just the thing. Where is it, Judge Trent?"

"It 's a little place I have in Maine. A cousin of mine runs it for me. So you think, Martha, that I'm below criticism in this whole matter, do you? That 's a rather bright thought of yours about Thinkright."

"But it comes too late," returned Martha excitedly. "How do you know that Sylvia won't take the night train for the West right off to join that horrible Nat?"

"Then you think she has money?"

"I don't know. I only know she spurned the idea of any help from us."

"Would n't take a cent, eh?" rejoined Judge Trent. He turned toward Dunham. "I 'll take that twenty-five then, Boy. It 's pay-day for Hannah."

Dunham started from his leaning posture by the mantelpiece, and the lawyer watched his embarrassed countenance as he began a search through his pockets. He succeeded in extracting bills from two.

"I've only eight dollars here, Judge," he said at last, avoiding the other man's eyes.

"H'm. You and Miss Lacey must have painted the town," remarked Judge Trent, accepting the money. "Had a good appetite for dinner in spite of your troubles, had n't you, Martha?"

"We did n't have luncheon together," returned Miss Martha, indignant at her friend's flippancy. "Do you suppose I cared whether I ever ate again or not?"

"The boy deserted you, did he? Did n't I tell you to take care of Miss Lacey?"

Dunham caught Judge Trent's eye for a second, and looked away. "I think I took care of her," he replied coldly.

"Of course you did," said Miss Martha impatiently. "He had business to attend to. Now perhaps you 'll choose some other time for joking, Calvin Trent, and tell me what you propose to do while valuable minutes are flying."

The judge drummed thoughtfully now on his desk. "That was a bright idea of yours concerning Thinkright," he remarked musingly.

"Then make it worth something!" responded Miss Lacey. His deliberate manner was driving her to frenzy. "Send a telegram if you can't send a detective. Say, 'News to your advantage coming,' or something like that. Anything to keep her there while we send for Thinkright."

"Send for him, eh?" mused the judge aloud.

"Why, of course!" responded Martha, in the very throes of impatience. "She would n't come with me, would she? She certainly would n't come with *you!*"

The speaker brought out the last pronoun with a vicious satisfaction.

"Too bad of you to blacken me to her like that," remarked the judge. "I sent, as I supposed, an entirely capable representative. John admitted that he could carry off the affair with flying colors. How about that hand you had tied behind you, Boy?"

Dunham changed his position. "It was a very strange and hard situation, Judge Trent," he replied stiffly. "Most unexpected and uncomfortable all around."

"Then I may assume that you untied the hand?"

The young man did not reply. His indignation at his employer's imperturbability was becoming as pronounced as Miss Lacey's.

"I ought to have gone," continued Judge Trent. "Really I did n't suppose that a fellow recommended as an expert by such high authority as himself could be so invertebrate. You actually came away just because the girl told you to. Why, a novice could have done that."

Dunham regarded the little man with a stern displeasure which entertained the judge highly. Then John turned toward Miss Lacey: "Just where is this farm you speak of?"

"It's in Casco Bay. You take the train from Portland and then drive."

"And this man with the strange name?" pursued Dunham.

"Oh, it is n't his name, but nobody thinks of calling him anything else. He's Judge Trent's cousin, Jacob Johnson, and he lives on this farm winter and summer.

He 's a good soul, and he was cousin to Sylvia's mother, too, of course, and he "—

"Casco Bay. I have friends who go there in the summer." Dunham's manner grew purposeful.

Judge Trent rubbed his chin the wrong way. "I *could* send a detective, Martha," he said thoughtfully. "I don't keep them in the back yard, but I usually have one around the office. I could shadow the girl."

Miss Lacey took hope. This met her longings. "If we only surely knew where she is!" she responded acutely.

"Yes, if we only did," the judge replied equably. "Where is she, Dunham?"

The young man flushed at the question.

"I can't tell you," he answered, after a moment's pause.

"Of course he can't," exclaimed Martha. "How queer you act, Calvin. *Do* you intend to do anything, after all?" Tears sprang to her eyes and overflowed, but she paid no attention to them as she gazed distractedly at the exasperating lawyer.

Judge Trent's manner changed. He even smiled into the tearful countenance, and as she had suddenly risen he rose too.

"Yes, Martha," he answered, "I expect to see something done about it right away. The fat actor shan't get Laura's little girl this time."

Miss Lacey regarded the shrewd face in the intervals of wiping her eyes. "You 'll telegraph to Sylvia, and send another message to Thinkright to come right here. Of course we can't be sure that Sylvia will get it, though — and there 's all Thinkright's traveling expenses." The speaker's wet eyes looked appealing.

"Dunham 's going to tell us where Sylvia is," returned the judge quietly. He paused, and Martha looked bewildered by this persistence. She turned toward John questioningly.

"I can't," replied Dunham again.

Judge Trent shrugged his shabby shoulders. "Oh, well, I suppose you can telegraph for us, then."

John swallowed, and meeting the lawyer's eyes, realized that he might as well save circumlocution.

"Well — yes."

"Of all things!" exclaimed Martha, with a start. "What do you mean?"

The judge hooked his thumbs in his armholes, regarding Dunham quizzically. "How about Jacob Johnson, Esquire, alias Thinkright. Do you suppose if I sent to him to shake the hayseed out of his hair and come on here you might unburden yourself to him somewhat?"

"Look here, Judge Trent," said Dunham, with exasperation, "perhaps you think I've had a pleasant day."

The lawyer approached the speaker and patted his big arm. "Could you, John, could you, do you think?"

"Yes, confound you!"

"Then we're fixed, Martha," said Judge Trent calmly. "You 're all right, Dunham. You did n't overrate yourself at all."

"But I don't understand," exclaimed Martha tremulously, looking from one to the other.

Judge Trent opened the door for her ceremoniously.

"The intricate workings of the law, Martha, are difficult of explanation; but, after all, what do you care if

the net result proves to be the arrival of your niece at the Mill Farm in a few days."

"Of your niece, Calvin," returned Miss Lacey, moving to the door, followed by Dunham, whose brow was lowering. "Don't think of coming with me, Mr. Dunham," she added, turning to him. "It is still fully light — and," ingratiatingly, "did you say you were going to telegraph Sylvia?"

"Yes."

"What shall he say, Calvin?"

"I should trust his judgment before my own," returned the lawyer. "Here's your eight dollars, Boy, and you're a trump."

John took the money without smiling; but he was glad to know about the farm.

Miss Martha boarded her car with a heart that was questioning but beginning to hope, and her mind was busy piecing together the evidence.

Mr. Dunham had left her for hours. He had been unable to return Judge Trent's money. He knew where Sylvia was.

Her misery gradually abated, and before she reached her gate she began to wonder if her bonnet had been on straight during the recent interview.

CHAPTER VI

SYLVIA'S CALLER

When Dunham's telegram reached Sylvia Lacey she was for the time being powerless to disobey it. The excitement and disappointment of the interview with her aunt had resulted in a feverish attack which, though slight, destroyed her ambition to do more than lie on her narrow bed and meditate upon the situation.

She could not write to the friends at home who had pictured such a pleasant future for her with her Boston relatives. She was not able even to go out and buy a "Dramatic Mirror" to discover where Nat's company would be playing the coming week.

She lay white and slender in her black wrapper, and listlessly fingered the telegram, which was now two days old. It read: —

"Do not leave Association till you hear from me. Important. John Dunham."

In the hopelessness of her thought her mental pictures of Dunham were always mortifying. He had heard her belittled, had heard her father slandered, had forced her to accept grudging charity, and yet the sunshine of the smile with which he had bade her good-by, his encouraging words and friendly handclasp, formed the only spot of cheer in her wilderness. The telegram was

a straw to which she clung when, in the processes of dismal thought, waves seemed to go over her head.

What important matter could be coming to her? If it were only that he intended returning, with apologies or propositions from her discarded relations, she told herself with set lips that his errand would be fruitless; but even while she took comfort in reiterating this resolution, she was finding a ray of brightness in the idea that he would be the messenger.

Her aunt's words often recurred to her. "Of course we knew you would wish to get something to do."

In the precarious hand-to-mouth existence she had led with her father since she was old enough to understand his visionary, happy-go-lucky temperament, he had regarded her and taught her to regard herself as a flower of the field. He had petted her, praised her beauty, and had managed to pay their board spasmodically in first one, then another locality; and being a good fellow who usually won the hearts of his creditors, it was not until after his death that a multitude of small claims came buzzing about his daughter's ears; and it was these as much as anything which had made her accept with childlike insouciance the arrangement of the friends who packed her away to her relatives with all the celerity possible.

Her father's men friends had always admired and flattered her; she supposed that men were all alike, and that she had but to throw her lovely arms around Uncle Calvin's neck and tell him of her father's misfortunes and petty debts to have all troubles smoothed away. She had doubted a little how she should like Uncle Calvin and Aunt Martha (the latter's stiff epistles

had not prepossessed her), but she had never entertained one question as to how they would like her.

To hear it declared first and foremostly that they took no interest in her, and did not want her, and secondly, that they proposed sending her out into the world to work for her living — these nightmarish facts made her rebound at once to the memory of the carefree, shabby environment where rosy possibilities had always been held before her. As her eyes rested now on the bare wall of her bedroom, it softened and melted until she saw a vision of footlights, herself in the centre of the stage, while a murmur of applause, heart-warming, inspiring, intoxicated her senses.

The day-dream soothed her to slumber, but the applause continued. Instead of rejoicing, at last it began to disturb her. Her eyes slowly opened, and she grew conscious that some one was knocking on her door.

At her summons a maid entered. "Somebody to see you, Miss. You don't feel well enough, do you?"

The girl's tone was sympathetic. Sylvia was of a different type from those who usually sought the Association. Her appearance suggested romance.

"Who is it?" she asked eagerly, half rising. "A man?"

"Yes 'm."

"A tall man, very straight?"

"He ain't so awful straight," returned the maid doubtfully.

"Thick hair?" (quickly).

"Yes 'm."

"Handsome teeth?"

"I — I did n't see his teeth."

"Splendid chin?"

"Law, ma'am, his beard covers his chin."

"Beard!" Sylvia sprang to her feet. "You 're crazy."

"No, I ain't, ma'am. Oh, 't ain't the gentleman you came here with, and the superintendent said was one o' the best connected folks in Boston. 'T ain't him. I saw him. He 's grand. I guess this one is sort of a country gentleman, but he 's awful pleasant-spoken and his beard 's as white as the driving snow."

Sylvia flung herself back on the bed. "You 've made a mistake. He asked for somebody else."

"No, ma'am," returned the maid; "because I thought first he said 'silver lace,' and I thought maybe he was a peddler, 'cause he had a bag; so I told him we did n't want anything, and he was real nice. His eyes sort of twinkled up, and he said *he did* want something. He wanted to see Miss — Sylvia — Lacey, real slow; and was you here? and I said you was, and he told me to tell you a cousin of your mother's wanted to see you, and his name was Jacob Johnson."

"I never heard of such a person," said Sylvia. "Does he look shabby — poor? It sounds like an impostor."

"N-no," returned the girl doubtfully. "He ain't exactly a Rube, but then you 'd know he was n't a swell, either. He looks awful nice out of his eyes. I 'd like to have him *my* mother's cousin."

This was somewhat encouraging, but country cousins were no part of Sylvia's plan. "You go down and tell him I've been ill. I'm not able to see him," she said at last decidedly.

"I don't like to one bit," returned the maid. "I kind of hate to disappoint him." She lingered a moment, but Sylvia shrugged her shoulders and turned her face to the wall, so the girl departed.

Only a couple of minutes had passed when the knock sounded again on Sylvia's door, and the maid pushed it open without awaiting permission.

"He asked was you able to be dressed," she began, rather breathless from her quick run, "and I said you was, and he said for me to tell you he'd come about the telegram you got."

Sylvia was still holding the telegram. She started. So Mr. Dunham was not coming. He had not admired her, then. He did despise her as a cast-off poor relation. A flush rose to her cheeks, and she sprang from the bed quickly. "I'll go down," she said briefly.

"Well, I'm real glad," declared the maid. "That wrapper looks all right. I would n't stop to change."

She gazed admiringly at the brilliant tints of Sylvia's complexion as the girl ran a comb through her reddish curls.

"Indeed I shan't change for him," responded Sylvia. Her heart was hot within her. Dunham might have come himself. Now she should never see him again, and she did n't care. The only reason she had wished to meet him was to show him her inflexibility and independence despite her acceptance of the despised money he had forced upon her.

She swept by the maid, who continued to gaze after her with admiration, and went downstairs to the reception room.

There she found a man with gray hair and short white

beard, sitting near a window, a somewhat limp bag on the floor beside him. She paused inside the doorway and stood regarding him.

There was nothing interesting in his appearance. She had had all she wanted of relatives. If those who would have been creditable would none of her, she certainly would none of this countrified individual and his claim of cousinship.

"Good-afternoon," she began coldly. "You say you have brought me some explanation of Mr. Dunham's telegram?"

"Why, why," said the stranger, gazing at her musingly as he slowly rose from his chair; "is it possible that you are Laura's little girl?"

He stood noting her repellent attitude, and Sylvia recalled the maid's ardent recommendation of the manner in which he looked out of his eyes.

"You resemble her very little," he continued, in a slow, quiet voice as pleasant as his gaze. "I had n't remembered that Sam Lacey was so good-looking."

This familiar mention of her mother and father seemed to establish the stranger's claim, but Sylvia was reluctant to grant it. Her hand was still against every man, and her look did not soften.

As she kept silence the visitor continued. "You 've heard your mother speak of her cousin Jacob Johnson, perhaps?" he asked wistfully.

"Never," returned the girl briefly.

The man nodded. The lines in his forehead accented his expression of patience. His loving eyes studied the young features before him.

"Yes," he sighed, "you were still only a little girl

when she went away, and her life was full of other things." A pause. "I wanted to marry your mother, Sylvia." Something in his tone knocked at the door of the girl's heart. She closed it tighter and kept silence.

"Wanted to so much that I never married anybody," he went on with the same slow quiet. "She preferred Sam Lacey." The speaker's lips parted in a slight smile as tender as his eyes, which began to shine again. "As I say, I'd forgotten how good-looking Sam was."

The knocking at Sylvia's heart grew clamorous. This man's voice touched some chord; and he admired her. She demanded that.

"I've tried to think right about it ever since I knew how," he continued with simplicity, "but there were long years when I didn't know how, and when the whole world seemed unprofitable. It's a real gift to see you, my little Sylvia."

The loving sincerity of the closing words shook that sensitive string in the girl's sore heart painfully. Her eyes filled while she endeavored to retain her self-control.

"It *is* an unprofitable world, full of coldness, full of disappointments," she answered brusquely.

He nodded. "True, true," he said, and advancing he took her cold hand gently and led her to the chair near his own.

They sat down together.

"That sense of things is the flat, stale, unprofitable stuff we hear about," he added. "You've been sick, too, they tell me."

"Who could tell you that?"

"The young man in Judge Trent's office. Dunham's his name."

Sylvia's face crimsoned, and she pulled her hand from its kindly prison.

"Then he has broken his word," she said passionately.

"Steady, my girl. Perhaps you have n't the facts, and you can't think right till you have, you know."

"He promised he would n't talk to Uncle Calvin about me."

"Perhaps he has n't. You did n't think I was Judge Trent in disguise, did you?"

"Did he only talk to *you?* Truly, did he?"

"So far as I know. Your uncle telegraphed for me to come to the office, and I reached there this morning. I suppose Mr. Dunham had n't promised not to talk about you to anybody on earth, had he? Your Cousin Jacob is harmless."

Sylvia looked into the small eyes so luminous with kindness.

"But it was Uncle — Judge Trent who sent for you?"

"Yes, I think he 'd somehow got the idea that you did n't care about seeing him."

"They 've been cruel to me. Aunt Martha was — Oh, I must n't, I can't speak of it!" The girl's lips pressed together after the vehement burst.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," said Cousin Jacob. The quotation from his lips became a remark. His companion looked at him in surprise. "I 've an idea you 're some ways off the inheritance, Sylvia."

"There 's a difference between meekness and servility, I hope," she returned hotly.

"I hope so," agreed Jacob Johnson equably. "This

matter's just like everything else, little girl. You have n't any call to do anything about it but just think right."

"Oh," murmured Sylvia impatiently.

"Yes, I know. It takes time, especially if you are n't in practice. That Mr. Dunham's an honest, manly chap?" He put it as a question.

"Yes, indeed."

"There, then." The visitor nodded. "So far, so good. He told me where you were."

"And not Uncle Calvin?"

"No, he'd promised not to. A girl who thought she was high-strung, excited, and mad, made him promise not to."

"Is that the way he described me?"

Cousin Jacob pointed an emphasizing finger. "She's thinking it again. No, he did n't describe you in just those words. Well, Judge Trent and Miss Lacey took this business a good deal to heart, after all; and they sent for me to tell me about things; and as long as Mr. Dunham told me where you were, I thought I'd take a run to Boston. I'd go many a mile further to see Laura's child."

"I wish she had told me about you instead of wasting time making me kiss Uncle Calvin's picture good-night." The scornful tone brought another smile to her companion's lips.

"Your Uncle Calvin has made his mark," he said.

"A black and blue one, I'll warrant," retorted Sylvia.

Jacob Johnson shook his head gravely. "He's made his mark, and your Cousin Jacob is only a farmer."

Sylvia's lips had nearly formed the words, "I thought so." Her eyes dropped involuntarily to the limp bag.

"I was wondering what you were intending to do here in Boston, little girl?"

"I can't stay in Boston," she returned, and her lip quivered. "Just think, Cousin Jacob, I'm spending Uncle Calvin's money when I hate him! Is n't it awful?"

"It is," returned the other, with conviction. "Hating folks is the very worst business anybody can invest in."

"I did n't mean that. Is n't it awful to be obliged to him? You don't know. You don't understand."

"Yes, I do," the speaker nodded. "I know the whole thing from A to izzard. Well, how do you expect to leave Boston, and what will you do?"

"Go on the stage."

"Oh, I guess not, little one. How old are you? You look fifteen, but you're more. I remember when you were born, and how I envied Sam."

"I'm nineteen."

"If you were going on the stage, it would have been well to be thinking of it even sooner. Have you had any experience?"

"No, except knowing an actor."

"And you're counting on his help?"

"Yes. I think I'd better marry him."

Jacob Johnson looked at her in silence. "You love him?" he asked at last.

"A — pretty well."

Her companion shook his head, smilingly. "Is he famous?"

"No. He says his chance has never really come."

"Young?"

"Oh, no."

Cousin Jacob threw back his head. "What a way out of trouble: to marry an actor of that sort whom you love pretty well! You are very good to look at, Sylvia, my child, and any chance you could get on the stage would come from that. Bad business, hard business, dangerous business. Anyway, you're not strong yet. I have a proposal to make you. Come up with me to the farm for a while and drink milk."

"Why, Cousin Jacob!" Sylvia's cheeks had grown very white, and now a little color stole back into them. "Oh, you're kind!"

"Well, then, if you think so, come!"

"When?" Sylvia already had a sick dread of the little room upstairs and its thoughts.

"Now."

"To-day — to-night?" eagerly.

He nodded. "We may as well go to Portland to-night as to stay here. Then we'll go to the farm to-morrow."

Sylvia took his hand in both hers and looked earnestly into his eyes. "Forgive me," she begged.

"For what?"

"For being so — so snippy when I first came into the room; for not believing in you, nor wanting you."

Cousin Jacob took her chin in his hard hand and his shining gaze met hers.

"You were n't thinking right, Sylvia. Ought n't it to make you easier on other folks? Other folks who did n't know you, who did n't believe in you, who did n't want you? They were n't thinking right, and they suffered for it afterward just as we all do. You 'd

have been kind to your Cousin Jacob in the end, anyway. They'd have been kind in the end to their niece. I saw you were n't glad to see me. I might have picked up my grip and left" —

"Oh, I'm so glad you did n't. I'm so glad you did n't! You'll wait while I pack?"

He patted her shoulder. "Yes, oh, yes. I'll wait."

CHAPTER VII

THE MILL FARM

SYLVIA'S sleep that night in Portland was profound. A sense of peace and safety had grown upon her from the time she took the train out of Boston with her new companion; and the next morning she awoke refreshed, in a chamber filled with sunlight.

She dressed and went down to the dining-room of the boarding-house where they were staying, and found her cousin standing by the window looking out on the fresh green of tall elms that shaded the quiet street.

"Well, well," he said, turning to meet her bright eyes. "Spring outside, and spring inside. You 've had a good sleep, little one."

He held out both his hands, and Sylvia put hers into them.

"Dear me, I 'm afraid it 's noon," for now she noticed that breakfast had been served.

"No, we have time still to make the train I told Cap'n Lem to meet, and eat a little something into the bargain."

The speaker moved to the table and rang a bell.

"Oh, you 've waited too long for your breakfast," said Sylvia.

"No, indeed! Been watching the orioles that are bringing up a family out in that tree. Busy times, I tell

you. Makes me think of the day Calvin and I wanted to rob an oriole's nest, — hang-birds, we called them, — and a little girl with short curls and a sunbonnet would n't let us do it; a girl who 'd stand only a little higher than your elbow."

"Mother?" asked Sylvia softly.

Jacob Johnson nodded, and they sat down to breakfast.

An hour later they were speeding along in the train nearing the town which was their destination.

"I never have been on a farm, Cousin Jacob," said Sylvia.

"'T is n't much of a farm we have here," he replied. "Just enough to raise a living for ourselves and the stock in the winter. The chief business is fruit and vegetables for the summer folks. Cal— the owner of the place likes this part of the world for what time he can get off in summer, so he bought this little farm and hired me to run it. That was ten years ago. I was n't enjoying the business I was at in those days, but I was just learning to think right about things then, and I knew I 'd be shown something else if it was best, and so I was."

"What made you know it?" asked Sylvia.

Her companion smiled without looking at her. "How do you know the sun is shining this morning and the apple-trees are in blossom?"

"Why, I can see that."

"I saw, too, Sylvia. It 's a great thing when you begin to see."

The girl observed her companion's half-averted face curiously. "Who lives with you at the farm?" she asked.

"My two helpers. Good Cap'n Lem Foster and his daughter-in-law, young Lem's widow. She's an excellent cook. Can you cook, little one?"

"I?" the girl laughed. "I can make Welsh rarebit."

Her companion patted her hand. "Sam Lacey brought you up, did n't he?" he remarked.

"You see we always boarded," went on Sylvia, "because father — well, it was better; he was contented if he could play cards and go to a show sometimes; and when he had had too much he always kept away from me — he was so good about that."

"Too much?" echoed her companion questioningly.

"Yes, of course he 'd go out with the boys some nights, but they always kept him away from me until he was all right again."

The matter-of-fact tone gave the listener a pang. His big hand closed over the one he had been caressing. "You 're in a prohibition state now," he remarked.

"Yes, I remember. I've heard father speak of it. I was just thinking of a verse he used to say: —

"'Johnny and Jane,
Maiden and swain,
Never had tasted a drop of champagne;
Reason is plain,
They lived in Maine,
Where all the folks are obliged to drink rain.'"

"H'm. I wish they were," commented the other, regarding the black-clothed figure beside him. A thin veil was pinned to her hat in such a way as to cover the shortness of the soft curls. Her figure was erect, her coloring exquisite, her eyes innocent. She seemed

to him like a jewel which had been set in base metal, carelessly guarded, and was now in danger of sinking into the mud of the highway. Laura's little girl!

He patted her hand again.

"Here we are," he said, as the train slackened and stood still. He took his own limp bag and Sylvia's plump, rubbed old one, and they moved down the aisle and out upon the platform.

"There's Lem." Jacob Johnson moved across the platform, and Sylvia followed him to where stood a two-seated wagon with a pair of strong horses. The driver leaned one arm on his leg as he looked passively at Sylvia. He wore a sweater and a felt hat, and had on blue overalls the color of his eyes. He was older than his employer, and a fringe of white whiskers surrounded his red, weather-beaten face.

"Howdy, Thinkright," he said, nodding as the couple approached.

"How are you, Cap'n Lem? This is my little cousin, Miss Lacey."

"Glad to see ye, Miss Lacey. Ye've got hahnsome weather," observed the old man. "Mawdrate, too, to what it has ben. Apple-trees hev all bust out."

"Yes, you must have had a fresh trip in this morning," responded Thinkright, as he saw to having Sylvia's trunk and the bags put on the wagon. At last he climbed in beside his guest. A slap of the reins set the heavy horses trotting deliberately.

Cap'n Lem sat halfway around in his seat in order to converse on farm matters, and Sylvia enjoyed the spring beauty about her as they drove out of the little town and took the country road.

"How's the jedge?" asked the captain at last.

"He's well. Told me to tell you he'd be after you for lobsters before long."

The old man gave a toothless smile. "Miss Lacey smaht?" he inquired.

"I suppose so. I did n't see her this time."

Sylvia's eyes began to look startled and questioning. Old Lem met her gaze. "Ye've got the same name," he remarked curiously, as the fact occurred to him, "same as Miss Marthy. Miss Marthy ain't no kin to you, is she, Thinkright?"

"No, except through this child. This little girl is a link."

"The missin' link, eh?" returned Cap'n Lem. "Well, all I kin say is she don't look it," and his shoulders twitched with delight. "The missin' link," he repeated from time to time, the utterance being always followed by a fresh convulsion of mirth as his sea-blue eyes roved to the visitor's grave face.

"Do they come here, Cousin Jacob?" asked Sylvia uneasily, under cover of the rattle of the wagon, "Uncle Calvin and Aunt Martha?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Will they be likely to, soon?" asked the girl, her face hardening.

Her cousin shook his head, and she saw compassion in his shining gaze.

"Don't fret about that," he said quietly. "Hot weather in the towns is a long way off yet."

"What 'd the jedge say in the matter o' the new shed?" asked Lem, when he had somewhat recovered from the enjoyment of his joke.

"He said he thought we'd better have the old one shingled."

"Turrible short-sighted, that's what I say," grumbled the old man; "but he ain't ever fer branchin' out, the jedge ain't. Why did n't ye talk him over to it, Thinkright?"

"I did n't feel strongly about it. He'd do it if I urged him; but it's just as you say, he does n't want to branch out. The place serves his purpose as it is, and while he owns it he'll keep it just as compact as it is now."

"What judge are you talking about?" asked Sylvia.

"Jedge Trent, of course," replied Cap'n Lem. "There hain't never ben a time when he wa'n't as sot as the everlastin' hills."

"Judge Trent is this child's uncle," said Jacob Johnson.

"No offense, no offense," remarked Cap'n Lem equably. "Seems if she's related to a lot o' folks," he added, and at this moment a team of colts came prancing around a curve in the road, trying their best with every nervous spring to escape their driver's control. Cap'n Lem's heavy horses shrank and shied, then as the others clattered by they resumed their steady gait. The old man turned and saw the white, fixed look in Sylvia's face.

"They would n't do nawthin'," he declared consolingly. "They're both powerful mawdrate hosses. Besides," — the speaker stole a half-mischievous, half-shy look at her companion, — "Thinkright 'll tell ye it's one o' the seven deadly sins to be skeered of anythin' that's in heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the sea that in them is."

The curving road was leading up a hill. The gray horses soon began to draw their burden at a walk, and when they reached the summit they stopped, for it was a time-honored observance for them to catch their breath at this point, as it was for the passengers, if strangers, to hold theirs.

The grandeur hitherto concealed by earth and forest suddenly broke into view. A limitless expanse of sea lay revealed, pierced by points of fir-crowned land that drove rock ledges into the liquid blue. Sylvia gazed fascinated at the snowy froth tossing itself against every gray point. Islands of varied shapes rose here and there, some tree-covered, some bare mounds of green, studding the rolling sapphire distances, and the girl's breast rose involuntarily to meet the untold miles of sparkling motion and the free, fresh, sunlit air. Her hands clasped together, and Jacob Johnson watched her white face with its wide eyes and mute lips.

The exceptional beauty of the May day caused even Cap'n Lem to expend silent approval on the familiar scene. He waited for a longer period than usual before he clucked to the horses, and they began a cautious descent of the winding road, their heavy hind-quarters braced almost against the wagon in their experience of sundry rolling stones.

"Hahnsome weather, surely," he remarked.

"I've never, never dreamed of anything like it," ejaculated Sylvia, and relapsed into dumbness.

Her host smiled, well pleased.

As the road descended to a level it approached the water of a small bay whose sheltered reaches watered a luxuriant evergreen growth among which appeared

an occasional birch. These adorned the sloping bank, interspersed with rock, and turned the blue depths to green as they leaned toward the water as if in the effort to catch their own lovely reflections.

"We 'll get out here and walk up to the house, Cap'n," said Thinkright. "Tell Mrs. Lem we 'll be there by supper time. We had our luncheon on the road."

Sylvia took the hand her host offered in silence, and jumped out of the wagon. Cap'n Lem clucked to the horses again, and they rattled away.

"Why does he call you Thinkright?" the girl asked abruptly, as her companion paused on a clearing in the grassy bank to let her view the picture before them.

Jacob Johnson smiled. "They rather like nicknames in this part of the world," he answered. "I did n't realize how much I used the expression until all the neighbors began to label me. I knew I was always trying to be on the mental watch, and what is much in the mind will out, I suppose. How do you like this basin? We think it very pretty."

Apparently it was an inland lake that lay at their feet, sparkling and rippling in the triumphant fullness of the tide. At the point where the curving shore ran out to sea stood a large deserted tide mill on posts, midway in the water. Its shuttered windows looked like eyes closed against the surrounding beauty, and seemed protesting against the witnesses of its failure. Twice every day, like a tumultuous rushing river the tide poured water into the spacious basin, until its ripples clambered ten feet toward the eagerly bending trees, and later the capricious flood rushed back to the bosom of the sea. There had been enormous power at work under the old

mill. What was lacking that it had fallen into disuse and closed its eyes upon an unappreciative world?

"It's a picturesque place, eh, Sylvia?" Thinkright repeated his question as she gazed and kept silence.

"Yes," she replied, "but the view above was — there are n't words."

"True;" her companion nodded. "You see a farm would n't do well at such a height, so we have to come down to shorter views and shorter distances; but it's a great thing to know that all the grandeur is there. We've seen it, and we know we've seen it, and we can't forget it; it's an inspiration to us. It takes a lot of wisdom to sail out on that ocean you saw up there, to avoid the ledges and to manage wisely in the winds; but to sail or row about on this basin is within the power of most landlubbers. Nature's always reading us life lessons, Sylvia, always."

"I'm not one of the afraid kind," returned the girl, with a toss of her head. "I only wish I had a chance to go out on that ocean."

"Yes, I know. On the stage, for instance," returned her companion. "The ledges and the squalls have no terrors for you."

"I hope I have some brains and some common sense," she answered.

Thinkright laid a kind hand on her shoulder. "It's perfectly true that neither ledge nor wind could harm you if you knew why. Daniel was safe in the lions' den, but it was because he knew why."

At the touch of his hand the girl shrunk away, and he instantly dropped it. Her blue eyes met his now, dark and cold. "I have found that you don't al-

ways think right," she said. "Why did you deceive me?"

Her companion looked at his watch.

"We'd better be walking along," he remarked, and they entered a well-worn path just wide enough for two that led through the woods, but kept close to the small salt lake, whose shining blue shimmered between the branches.

"I haven't deceived you, little one," he answered.

"You knew that nothing would have induced me to be a guest at Judge Trent's farm," declared the girl hotly.

"What's the difference?" asked her companion mildly. "You were eating his bread in Boston."

Sylvia's cheeks flushed. "I — I" — she hesitated, "I was n't going to do it long."

"You shan't do it here a day longer than you wish to," returned Thinkright. "Now, child, suppose a case. Suppose your Uncle Calvin and your Aunt Martha had shown you perfect love instead of indifference, how would you have felt toward them?"

"Loved them, of course, and been thankful." Sylvia's angry eyes grew moist.

"That would have been a happier state of mind than what you have now, would n't it?"

"Of course." All the girl's sore spots were aching. "Why do you ask such a question?"

"Just to remind you of the fact. Now why should you let them make you lose the joy of being loving and thankful?"

"Why — how unreasonable! I can't help it, of course."

"Yes, you can. It's wonderful, Sylvia, but yes, you can. Think of being able to get out of the heat and turmoil of resentment and anger into the kingdom of heaven! You know where Jesus said it was?"

"No, I don't."

"Within you. The kingdom of heaven is within you."

"I guess not," returned Sylvia, with heaving breast. "Father always said there was plenty of old Adam in me, and I know it is n't human nature to be loving toward people that have treated me as they did."

"No, indeed it is n't. Your only chance is in finding out that you have a higher nature inherited from our Father in heaven, who the Bible declares is Love. When you allow that nature to have sway you will, as somebody has beautifully put it, 'think God's thoughts after him.' You will think mercifully and lovingly of your uncle and aunt, and forgive them as you would be forgiven. That way lies happiness."

The girl raised her blue eyes to his curiously. "So you consider it thinking right to live in a sort of a fools' paradise?"

Her companion smiled at her and his eyes shone. "I leave it to you if it is n't better than yours," he returned. "You believe in God, don't you, Sylvia?"

She cast down her glance. "I've thought lately sometimes that I'd like to; but he's so far away, on the outest edge of the universe."

"Why, what's the name of the place he lives in?"

"Heaven, I suppose."

"Well, where did I just remind you is the kingdom of heaven?"

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders. Thinkright's voice had again that tone that tapped at her heart as at a closed door, and instinctively she resisted it.

"Within you, little child," went on her companion, after a waiting pause. "God far away? 'Nearer than hands and feet,' Sylvia, 'nearer than hands and feet.' "

"I don't understand anything of what you're saying," returned the girl abruptly.

"Well, is n't this a pretty path?" asked Thinkright, looking about them. "It seems only yesterday that all these evergreens were loaded with snow." As he spoke, a song-sparrow near by poured out a flood of melody.

"Ah!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes glistening.

"Oh, if you like birds you are going to enjoy the Mill Farm. We have a very respectable choir in these woods. Now we could keep on in this path past the mill, 'way out to the end of the peninsula, but we don't this time; instead we turn right here and then" — the speaker waved his hand up a gentle incline, at the head of which stood an oblong white house with green blinds; "that's the Mill Farm."

"Judge Trent's farm." Sylvia's eyes met those of her host. "Why did you deceive me?" she repeated, gazing at him while they stood still in the soft grass.

Thinkright brought the knuckles of one of his hands into the hard palm of the other. "I asked you to come to the farm, did n't I? You were not thinking kindly of Judge Trent then; you were wasting your time thinking wrong about his wrong doings. If I'd said come and be your uncle's guest at the Mill Farm instead of at the Young Woman's Christian Association, you 'd have

questioned and doubted some time probably, and we might not have caught that evening train to Portland, and it was best for me to get home."

Sylvia bit her lip.

"Now there is n't one thing to do but think right," went on her host kindly, "and you 'll be happy as a girl should be. You believe there 's satisfaction in slapping back, and it galls you because you can't. It 's the greatest mistake you can imagine. The satisfaction of slapping back only leads on to greater complications and final disaster in a logical sequence. Now, I 'm not penniless, my little cousin. Just at present you 're my guest."

"Oh, am I really, Cousin Thinkright?" cried the girl eagerly.

"Surely you are."

"Then I can begin to have a good time right off," she exclaimed, her white cheeks flushing as she took his arm in her relief.

He smiled as they walked slowly up the incline. "Always have a good time," he said. "The daughter of a great King should hide her head in shame if she admits any other thought."

CHAPTER VIII

IN HARBOR

As Cap'n Lem's team drew deliberately up the hill to the house, his daughter-in-law and grandchild came out on the doorstep. "Hello, Lucil; hello, Minty," he cried.

Twelve-year-old Araminta, dressed in a red plaid frock, long of legs and arms, round of eyes, and with her braid beribboned in pink in honor of the unknown, looked her disappointment. "They never come!" she exclaimed. "We might jest as well as not rode to town, ma."

"Well, we could n't 'a' known it, and no use cryin' over spilt milk," returned her mother. Mrs. Lemuel Foster had raised her pompadour exceptionally high this morning, and the knot at the back of her head had the psyche-like protuberance reserved for state occasions.

"Whoa, Jim. Hi thar, Pete," said Cap'n Lem, for his steeds began to exhibit spirit at the proximity of the barn. "Oh, yes, they come all right."

"Then who is it?" cried the two on the doorstep, in perfect unison. Thinkright's message had not specified the nature of his guest.

"The missin' link," replied Cap'n Lem. "Haw, haw, haw!"

The pent-up roar burst forth at last.

"Father, he *hain't* brought home a monkey!" Mrs. Lem's consciousness of the trail on her black brilliantine suddenly failed to support her company manner. "Do tell me you 're foolin'!" she added acutely.

"Why, I think 't would be splendid!" cried Minty eagerly, watching her grandfather's heaving shoulders. "Where 'd ye leave 'em, grandpa?"

"Daown t' the Basin."

Minty clapped her hands, and her round eyes shone. "To let it have a drink and run through the woods. Oh, what fun! I'll let it sleep with me."

Her mother gave her a sounding slap. "Hold your tongue, Minty Foster, and let the cap'n speak. Why did Thinkright ask me to get the best room ready, then? If a monkey comes into this house I go out of it, and I *stay* out."

"'T ain't a monkey, no, 't ain't," returned Cap'n Lem tearfully but pacifically; "but I made the best joke, Lucil, if I do say it. I 'm laughin' yit. Ye could n't 'preciate it till ye see her, then I 'll tell ye, an if yew don't bust your sides" —

"Her? Is she young or old?" demanded Mrs. Lem, recovering a sense of the lustre on her brilliantine.

"Oh, pretty so-so," returned her father-in-law aggravatingly.

"Then they 'll be up here in a few minutes," said Mrs. Lem, her black eyes snapping. "Get in out o' the wind, Minty, or you won't have no Boston left." She smoothed the limp roll into which Minty's front hair had been coaxed, and pushed her inside the open door, where the child lingered.

"You might tell who she is, grandpa," she called.

"Why, then, — come now, I will. It's mean to tease ye. It's Miss Lacey."

"Oh—!" A long-drawn sound of disappointment escaped from both his hearers. "Why could n't Thinkright have said so!" exclaimed Mrs. Lem. "Miss Lacey'd jest as lieves have seen us in our every-day things."

"I don't care," said Minty, hopeful still. "Miss Lacey nearly always brings me somethin'."

"Take that pink ribbon right off your braid," commanded her mother, reëntering the house.

"Oh, no, ma, it goes so good with this dress," pleaded Minty, looking down affectionately at the red plaid.

"Let her keep 'em on," said Cap'n Lem. "They ain't no time to change. They're a-comin' right up. Thinkright asked me to tell ye they'd be here for supper. They hain't had nothin' but trash on the road, I guess. Miss Lacey looks kind o' peak-ed;" and so saying, the old man drove on to the barn, his eyes closed tight as he slapped his knee in enjoyment of this second witticism, possibly even better than the first.

Minty skipped around helping her mother with the tea things, but her round eyes were first to discern the pair who came in sight on the hillside.

"There they be," she exclaimed, running to the window; "and ma," in deep excitement, "they're hookin' arms!"

"What are you talkin' about?" exclaimed her mother, whose pompadour fairly heaved in the jerk with which its wearer rose from the oven at this significant information.

"They are," repeated Minty, secure in her tremen-

dous discovery; "come and look. Do you s'pose," in a hushed tone, "do you spose they're beaux, ma?"

"Hold your tongue, Minty Foster; you're too young to say such things," returned her mother; but the pompadour continued in a state of violent unrest as Mrs. Lem gazed at the new-comers and rapidly reviewed the situation and its possibilities. "I can't say it would n't be fittin'," she murmured, as she stood behind her daughter.

The approaching pair seemed absorbed in close conversation as they sauntered slowly, the lady's face downcast and her companion's eyes upon her.

"I'll never stay here with her, though, never in this world," — went on Mrs. Lem, "and probably she would n't want me to."

"Oh, ma, then we'll have to go back to Hawk Island. I don't want to," wailed Minty.

"Hush!" commanded her mother, giving the child's shoulder a nervous shake. "Don't you dare to cry, Minty Foster. I guess you lived at Hawk Island a good while, and you can do it again."

"Yes, but then pa was n't drownded; and here we've got" —

"As comfortable as I've made Thinkright, too. I'd call it downright ungrateful if 't was anybody but him," went on Mrs. Lem, paying no further attention to her offspring than to give the small shoulder another warning shake. "I s'pose he thinks age is goin' to steal on him before long, and he'd better be provided with some sure caretaker, and I can't deny 't would be a fine thing for Miss Marthy. I can just see them sharp eyes o' hers lookin' around here and takin' 'count o' stock. I always

thought she was terrible curious about how things went on here."

"P'raps they're married a'ready," hazarded Minty dismally.

The pompadour wavered almost to its fall in the start Mrs. Lem gave.

"Araminty Foster, how could you have such a thought at your age!" However, the housekeeper's fast-beating heart suddenly accepted the probability of the suggestion.

"Leggo my shoulder, ma." Minty wriggled out of the excited clutch. "I don't care, they walk jest the way Jim an' Kitty did when they come out o' church."

"What do you s'pose she's all in black for? Miss Marthy never had anybody to lose that ever I heard of. You don't suppose she'd go in black for one o' the Derwents, do you? It makes her look awful slim, and she walks so slow. Maybe she's been sick."

The couple were drawing very near. Thinkright evidently called his companion's attention to something in the top of the tall pine that grew near the house. Sylvia lifted her head, the chiffon veil floated backward, and she gazed long up into the tree while the watchers at the window stared.

"Why,—wha—" gasped Minty.

"Never mind!" ejaculated Mrs. Lem, in an altered tone. "Tell me, does my Boston look all right?" One trembling hand patted the imposing erection of shining black hair, while with the other the speaker pulled the open-mouthed Minty away from the window. "Now don't you never tell what we thought, Minty Foster, not if wild horses was to drag you. *Remember!*"

"All — all right," gasped the child, "but " —

"They ain't no but. The cap'n 's been playin' smart again an' fooled us. Don't you let on, Minty — never, *never*."

The series of jerks which accompanied the rapid flow of words was too energetic for Minty to retain sufficient breath to let on anything. Her mother trailed the brilliantine across the room with a self-command and return of composure truly remarkable, and throwing open the door, met the grave gaze of the guest with unsmiling majesty.

"How do you do, Mrs. Lem?" said Thinkright. "This is my young cousin, Sylvia Lacey, who is going to make us a visit. And this little girl is Minty Foster, Sylvia."

"Glad to see you, I'm sure, Miss Lacey," returned Mrs. Lem, giving the offered hand a loose shake. "Won't you step in?"

Minty said no word, but stared at the new-comer fixedly. The house door opened directly into the kitchen.

"We don't use front doors much in this part of the world," observed Thinkright, as he ushered in the guest.

"Will you step into the front room, Miss Lacey?" asked Mrs. Lem, with a grand air, "or would you prefer to go directly upstairs to your chamber?"

There was an atmosphere of the world about Sylvia which Mrs. Lem recognized at once from long experience with summer people; and secure in her pompadour, the psyche knot, and the shine of her best gown, she wished to show this young girl that her sophistication was shared even in a rural district. To be sure, the

extraordinary telegram from Thinkright had left the family free to believe that it was a personage whom he was bringing home with him — probably some important friend of Judge Trent; and to have their varied guesses met by the fact of a white-faced girl in mourning was disappointing. Nevertheless, to Mrs. Lem's suspicious eyes Sylvia had a cold, proud air, which caused the housekeeper to glory in her toilet and be grateful for her knowledge of the world. It should be Greek meeting Greek.

"Oh, she 'll go to her room," said Thinkright. "Cap'n Lem and I will bring her trunk and satchel right up. Supper 's nearly ready, I suppose, Mrs. Lem?"

"Whenever you are," returned that lady elegantly. "I will accompany you, Miss Lacey."

Minty, though she said no word, prepared to follow, apparently not able to remove her round gaze from the visitor.

"You may make the toast, Minty," said her mother warningly, and the child took a reluctant step backward.

Sylvia followed the brilliantine up a narrow staircase.

"You 're from Boston, I presume, Miss Lacey?"

"Yes, just now," returned Sylvia.

"Not your home, then?"

"No."

"There. Walk in. This is your chamber."

Mrs. Lem threw open the door of a blue-papered room whose ceiling sloped at one side, while on the other were two windows curtained in dimity.

"I did n't expect to see a room of this size," said Sylvia.

"Oh, it's quite a copious house," returned Mrs. Lem leniently, "for a country place. It took me some while to get used to these slopin' kind o' rooms. I ain't from these parts. I lived to Clarksville before I was married. There, you can loop them curtains back more if you want to."

"They're very pretty," commented the girl.

"Yes. Of course they ain't point de spray, but they do well enough for here."

"Looped back. Oh, I should think so," said Sylvia, pushing the folds aside and looking down the western decline of the hill, where a wide reach of Casco Bay came in view. Small snowy sails were flying out to sea, like a flock of white butterflies.

"I guess the fishermen think handsome weather's set in. Them are the mackerel boats," explained Mrs. Lem. "They ain't had a good chance for a fortnight. It's ben so cold and homely 't wa'n't plausible for 'em to go out." Mrs. Lem patted her pompadour.

"I can see a thousand Christmas trees from this window," said Sylvia.

"Yes, it's real sightly. Judge Trent has just the same view from his room. It's his favorite."

Sylvia's face fell. "When does he come?" she asked.

"Oh, he comes and goes all summer. He don't make no long stay except in August."

Here the two men with Sylvia's trunk and bag came noisily up the narrow stairs. It was a very moderate-sized trunk as those of summer people go, and the visitor lost some social prestige in Mrs. Lem's eyes as the latter observed it. Moreover, Boston was not the girl's home. Nevertheless, there was that unmistakable air of

the world. Possibly she was from wicked, fashionable, reckless New York, and being in mourning had come here with but few possessions to recuperate.

"Wall, how are ye likin'?" asked Cap'n Lem, when they had deposited the trunk.

He set his arms akimbo and smiled toothlessly upon the visitor. "I said 't was Miss Lacey, did n't I?" he added to Mrs. Lem, with a delighted wink.

"Yes, and you said somethin' else, too," retorted Mrs. Lem. "You say a lot o' things beside your prayers."

Upon this Cap'n Lem's cackling laugh burst forth. "She don't look it, does she?" he responded. "So ye're likin' all right, air ye, Miss Sylvy?"

"I could sit by these windows twenty-four hours," returned the girl.

"Might git a little hungry, mebbe?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lem," put in Thinkright. "Sylvia and I have had only sandwiches and sponge cake since this morning. We're all ready as soon as she has washed her face."

Mrs. Lem bowed affably, and the three went out and closed the door.

Sylvia moved to the dimity-draped dresser and took off her hat. She smiled at the memory of her recent interview. "Cousin Thinkright says she can cook, though," she reflected. "I hope he's a judge."

CHAPTER IX

EDNA DERWENT

THE supper was good, and for many weeks Sylvia had not eaten so hungrily. Minty's eyes continued to devour her as the guest devoured the biscuit and honey; and it required an occasional warning, "Eat your supper, Minty," from Mrs. Lem, to deliver Sylvia periodically from the round, expressionless stare.

"What delicious milk!" said the girl, as she set down her empty glass; "and this cream would make city people open their eyes."

"It don't seem to me it's quite as rich as common," returned Mrs. Lem. "We often have it so thick it has to be dilated with water."

Sylvia met Thinkright's eyes and laughed. "That is a frequent necessity in the city," she said. "I wish it were n't."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Lem raised her eyebrows, "I know it. Of course it takes such legions o' milk to supply the cities you can't trust 'em around a pump. Have some more o' the lobsters, Miss Lacey."

"Oh, no, thank you."

"Then," said Thinkright, "perhaps you 'd like to go and help Minty bring home her Daisy."

"Who is Daisy?" asked Sylvia of the solemnly staring child, who had been mute throughout the meal.

"My cow," drawled Minty.

"I 'm mortally afraid of cows," declared Sylvia.

"Daisy ain't ugly," returned Minty.

"Then if you 'll promise to take care of me" —

"I will," declared the child, her cheeks flushing with the pleasure that her drawl could not convey.

"She usually gits the cow afore supper," explained Mrs. Lem, "but to-day she could n't very well." She looked complacently at her child's toilet. "You need n't mind the dishes, Minty."

At the permission the child fled from the room and clattered up the back stairs. The others rose from the table, and Mrs. Lem assumed a large apron and began gathering up the dishes.

"You may help if you like, Sylvia," said Thinkright. "We want you to feel at home."

The girl hesitated. She disliked wrecks of meals, and the way for her to feel at home was to do nothing at all. She began awkwardly to take up the silver.

"No, no, don't do it, Miss Lacey." Mrs. Lem perceived at once the unaccustomed touch, and her New York hypothesis was strengthened. "You hain't any apern, and I do think," with an airy laugh, "you might git unpacked afore they set you to work."

"Oh, yes, let her help till Minty comes," said Thinkright, with the manner of conferring a favor upon the guest, who echoed a faint agreement and went on gathering up the knives and forks, while her host left the house. Her ordeal did not last long, for Minty, still flushed of cheeks from the excitement of the occasion, soon reappeared, the splendors of her recent costume as completely vanished as were Cinderella's at the stroke of twelve.

Her dark calico clung around her slim little body, and the white string that tied her braid was in evidence.

"Put on your sweater, Minty, and run up and git Miss Lacey's jacket for her. It 's real fresh," said her mother.

The sun had ceased casting sparkles across the sea when they went out of doors, and the shadows were lengthening. The loveliness of the increasing rose-light in the west caused Sylvia to forget all annoying doubts as to where to pour the water from the half-empty glasses, and all objections to the remains of lobster.

"What a pretty place you live in, Minty!" she exclaimed, as they walked back of the house through an orchard of small apple trees, gnarly and stunted enough from their struggle with the elements through the winter, but with all bumps and twists veiled now in rose-tinted clouds of white bloom.

"Yes, 't is. I like it a whole lot better 'n Hawk Island."

"Where is that?"

"Oh, off there." Minty pointed a vague finger behind them seaward. "We lived there when father went fishin' afore he was drownded. I was real small, and I did n't have no cow. Daisy was born the year we come here, and Thinkright gave her to me."

"Oh, she 's a pet, then; so I need n't be afraid of her."

"No-o, she would n't hook nobody! Beside, did n't you know if you 're skeered o' things they 're likely to happen?"

"Oh, are they? Well, luckily I 'm not scared of many things."

"Where do you live?" asked Minty, renewing her grave stare at the admired guest.

"I," — Sylvia's mind flew back over a panorama of abiding places. "A — I think I shall have to say nowhere," she replied after a pause. "I'm a tramp, Minty."

The child regarded her, unsatisfied and skeptical. "Why, where's yer mother and father?" she drawled.

"I," — again the mutability and doubtfulness of all things were brought home to Sylvia. "I don't know," she replied. "They are dead."

"There ain't any such thing," returned Minty. "When folks seem to be dead they're goin' on livin' jest the same. Thinkright says so."

"Does my cousin Thinkright know everything?" inquired Sylvia smiling.

"Of course he does." There was a brief pause, and then the catechism continued.

"How old be you?"

"Guess?"

"I don't know. You've got on long dresses and yer tall, but yer hair's shorter'n mine."

"Yes, I've been very ill and my hair all came out. It used to be straight as yours. I went to bed with my long hair braided smoothly, and got up with these new little kinks."

"I wish I knew where I could ketch that kind o' sickness," returned Minty, regarding the bright auburn rings enviously, "but don't tell Thinkright I said so," she added, with an afterthought. "He thinks bein' sick's as wrong as lyin'."

"My cousin Thinkright has some very odd ideas," returned Sylvia.

"There's Daisy a-mooin'," exclaimed Minty, her face lighting. "She hears us talkin'."

"Well, don't forget to tell her how charming I am, will you? It gives me the shivers to think I'm walking straight up to a pair of horns and not a fence in sight."

"She won't do nawthin';" the child smiled at the comical grimace her companion made, and a turn in the path revealed a white cow at the end of her tether looking eagerly toward them. A clump of evergreens rose beyond her.

"I think I'll climb one of those trees," said Sylvia. "She looks too glad to see me."

Minty laughed aloud, and running to the white cow threw her arms around her neck.

"Now then, introduce us," said Sylvia. "This is Miss Daisy Foster, I believe. So happy not to meet you, my dear! Please don't look as if you were going to rush into my arms the minute Minty lets go."

Minty laughed delightedly.

"I guess you'd better git back of her, Miss Lacey. When I untie her she might fall foul of yer and never mean to, she's so anxious for the barn."

Sylvia skipped toward the pines with alacrity. The sea wind and the situation had brought color into her cheeks.

"Why, the cow is anchored!" she exclaimed; for she perceived an ancient anchor at her feet to which that end of the rope was fastened.

"Yes. Daisy can't drag *her* anchor," returned Minty, her fingers busy with the knot at the cow's neck, "though

she 'd like to lots o' times. There now, Bossy, don't act so drove. I know it 's later 'n common, but I had a good reason, and 't ain't thinkin' right to be impatient." With the last word the rope fell free, and as the cow gave a bound Minty clung to its horns, and was carried forward, her feet scarcely touching the grass. Sylvia's heart leaped to her throat for a moment, but Minty's delighted laugh came back to her, and the guest laughed, too, at the child's antics.

Minty, glowing with superiority, could not resist this prime opportunity to make an impression, so went on with the romp as familiar to her as a more sedate method of locomotion, and finally the cow's gyrations carried her out of sight, leaving Sylvia alone and happy under the pine trees.

"Is n't it the strangest thing in the world that I should be here?" she thought, looking about. A memory returned to her of the cheap boarding-house in Springfield where her father breathed his last; of the worries that followed his decease; of her hurried journey; of the shock dealt her in Boston; of the stranger-cousin descending, as it were, out of the clouds to bear her up from the lowlands of mortification and hurt, to where the sea winds chased dull care away. The future troubled Sylvia very little. The thorn in the present was that Judge Trent owned this soft, grassy knoll on which she stood, owned that straight, symmetrical balsam fir yonder whose bright green tips full of the new life of spring were breathing balm on the air; owned the gambrel roof under which was her inviting chamber. Did he know she was here? She could not remember what her cousin had said about that. Mr. Dunham had

sent for Thinkright. Yes, now she remembered: Judge Trent had told him to send, doubtless to ease his conscience; to get her out of sight, and yet to know that his sister's child was safe.

Well, his sister's child would show him — At the revengeful impulse Thinkright's face suddenly rose before her with the words he had used about slapping back.

"The evening is perfect," exclaimed Sylvia aloud. The rose-light had begun to crimson the water. It drew her. She ran down the slope to the belt of birch and evergreen which surrounded the basin. Rays from the sinking sun were kissing the sightless upper windows of the Tide Mill until the weather-beaten shutters grew pink.

Sylvia entered the fragrant path she had traversed with her host that afternoon, and followed it toward the point of land beyond the mill. Suddenly a voice clear, bright, yet low-pitched fell on her ears, and almost simultaneously she caught a glimpse of the speaker between the trees.

The girl stood on the brink of the water, talking to some one in a small boat whose sail was flapping. Sylvia could not proceed without coming into sight, so she waited in order not to disturb the adieux. The boat had evidently just landed this passenger, who carried a bag and was dressed in a dark tailor suit.

The skipper, a sun-burned young fellow, was showing a row of strong white teeth at some sally from the lady when Sylvia's eyes fell upon him.

"I wish ye 'd let me carry the bag up fer ye," he said.

"No, I 'm going to punish myself for not being ready

in time for you to sail into the Basin. I ought to know by this time that it 's no use arguing with the tide."

" Always seems more sot here than anywhars," agreed the boy.

" Besides, I want you to have time to telephone for that carriage. Don't let them make any mistake. I must catch the one o'clock train."

"Yes. When are ye comin' fer good, Miss Edna?"

"Oh, in just a few weeks. June, some time. It 'll be pulling me, pulling me, from now on, Benny."

She smiled, and Sylvia could see her face. Black hair that shone with a fine silken lustre grew thickly about a white forehead. Brows that lay like smooth touches of satin swept in two fine lines above gay, kind brown eyes. Her smile merited the adjective "sweet" more than any Sylvia had ever seen; but the boatman's next words startled the listener.

"Miss Lacey comin', too, I s'pose?"

"Of course. What a question to ask a lone, lorn girl?"

"She did n't stop long last season."

"No; for I was in Switzerland. Why should she? But I can't spare her now, and she 's written me that she 'll come just as usual, so Anemone Cottage will be itself again."

"Well" — the boy hesitated for words to express his pleasure — "we can stand it if you can," he finished.

"All right, Benny," she laughed. "Get to Gull Point as quick as you can. I 've just one idea now, and that 's the telephone. Good-by." She waved her hand as he set the sail and took his oars to pull into the wind.

Sylvia saw him nod and smile back. Then that hap-

pened on which she had counted. The stranger came up into the path, and without seeing the watcher, walked swiftly away.

Sylvia had seen no home in the vicinity beside the farmhouse, and the familiar mention of Miss Lacey made it doubly certain that this low-voiced stranger, this girl whose broad *a*'s and lack of *r*'s sounded oddly upon Sylvia's Western ears, was going fast as her trim feet could carry her to Thinkright's home. A strange feeling beset Sylvia. The newcomer's perfect costume, the assurance and refinement of her manner, even the unconscious adoration in Benny's sea-blue eyes, all pointed to a superiority which made Sylvia vaguely resentful of her.

What Miss Lacey had she been talking about? Aunt Martha, of course. Had n't Cap'n Lem spoken of her also? What was she to this girl, — this raven-haired, charming girl who was nobody's despised niece?

Sylvia's heart beat hotly, and she began to run. Why was she wasting time when she wished to see what sort of reception would be accorded this stranger? Possibly, even, she was a favorite with Judge Trent. The thought gave Sylvia a forlorn pang, but she hurried on. Soon she again caught sight of the newcomer, who was passing out of the woods and starting up the incline that led to the house. Sylvia at once began to move slowly, her feet noiseless on the grass.

Cap'n Lem and Thinkright now came in view, returning from the barn, and Sylvia's eyes grew large as she heard the stranger's gay cry and the men's response.

They hastened down the hill to meet her. Cap'n Lem

took her bag while she laughingly received their surprised welcome, and she threw her arms around Thinkright's neck and kissed him. Neither of the three observed Sylvia, who followed at a distance until they went inside and the house door closed upon them.

Pausing, to wonder and speculate, the chill of the evening made the girl shiver. The door had shut her out. She felt lonely and forlorn.

CHAPTER X

CAPITULATION

When Sylvia finally drew near the kitchen she heard talking and laughing within. Turning the handle and opening the door, a happy domestic scene was revealed, of which the strange girl was the centre. Her hat and jacket were lying on a calico-covered couch, a large apron enveloped her cloth gown, and she was wiping the dishes as Mrs. Lem washed them at the sink. Minty was running back and forth putting them away. Thinkright and Cap'n Lem were seated near the stove, and as the door opened a burst of laughter escaped from them at some remark of the visitor.

At sight of Sylvia's white face her cousin arose.

"I was just beginning to wonder where you were, little girl," he said kindly. "I want you to know Miss Edna Derwent. This is my cousin, Sylvia Lacey, Edna."

The latter came forward, holding in one hand a plate and towel, while she offered the other to Sylvia's cold acceptance.

"I'm fond of the name of Lacey," said the visitor, smiling into the other girl's grave eyes with the same gay, sweet expression that a few minutes ago had rested on Benny the boatman. Thinkright noted the quick hardening of Sylvia's face.

"Your Miss Lacey is aunt to this one, Edna," he

said, "but Sylvia does n't know Miss Martha yet. She has lived in the West all her life."

Mrs. Lem's sharp ears absorbed this information.

"Your aunt keeps house for Miss Derwent in the summer time at her cottage on Hawk Island," he went on, turning to Sylvia.

"I have a mother who unfortunately does n't like the island, Miss Lacey," explained Edna, returning to the sink. "Take this plate, Minty, please."

"Guess you want another wiper, too, don't yer?" asked the child.

"I 'll take as many as you 'll give me," responded Miss Derwent. "I 'd like a fresh wiper every two plates; but don't you encourage me, Minty, or I shan't be popular with your mother. Fill up the kettle, too, there 's a dear. I 'm a reckless scalder. Why, the stove lid 's under that kettle. I wondered why it was n't hotter."

"Wait till I find the hooker," cried Minty, diving down under the stove in search of the iron.

"Minty Foster, how many times have I told you never to take that hooker off the string?" said her mother reprovingly.

"I jest wanted it to crack nuts with," explained Minty, as she fished the lifter out triumphantly.

"Well, don't you never untie it again!" responded her mother severely.

"Yes, you 'll crack it some day," remarked Edna, "and then what would you do, miles from a hooker as you are? I was telling you, Miss Lacey, that I have a mother with only one foible, — she does n't like our island. You will see what heresy it is when you come over there. So Miss Martha has taken pity on me the

last few summers, and I think she loves it as much as I do."

Sylvia's embarrassment was painful, as the speaker paused, looking at her in the natural expectation of a response.

"I don't know her," was all the reply her lips could utter.

"Then perhaps you will meet her first at my house," returned Edna brightly. "That would be very pleasant for me, I 'm sure. I should enjoy the novelty of making near relatives acquainted."

"I shan't be here when she comes," responded Sylvia quickly.

"Indeed? Why, I 'm sorry. I supposed you were to be a summer guest. You know Judge Trent, of course."

Sylvia's hot blush under the innocent question caused her cousin to come to the rescue again.

"No, even though he is her uncle," he said. "Strange state of things, is n't it?"

"Her uncle, and Miss Lacey her aunt?" returned Miss Derwent. "I never knew they were related."

"They are n't. It 's the two sides of the house, you see."

"Miss Sylvy 's the missin' link," put in Cap'n Lem, softly slapping his knee and shaking his head while his eyes closed tightly. "Don't look it, does she?"

"Now, Cap'n, don't git another spell o' the shallers," put in Mrs. Lem as the old man's chuckles threatened a crescendo.

"But you see I got ahead of the other relations," went on Thinkright. "I am her mother's cousin, and I put in my claim first."

"Oh, you 'll like Judge Trent so much," said Edna,

looking at the grave face in its aureole of curls. "He is a dear, but nobody dares to tell him so. By the way, Thinkright," the quaint name fell charmingly from the girl's lips as she turned to him, "I hear that a man I used to know, a Mr. Dunham, has gone into Judge Trent's office."

"So you know Dunham, do you?" returned her host.

"Yes, for a long time we saw a great deal of each other. Then Harvard for him and Vassar for me drifted us apart, but we have a lot of mutual friends, and while I was in New York the past winter a girl wrote me mournfully of his departure from Boston."

"I don't blame her for mourning," said Thinkright kindly, — "do you, Sylvia?" turning to the young girl, who was mortified to feel her color mounting again. "Sylvia knows Mr. Dunham."

"How stupid of him! Oh, how stupid of him!" was Sylvia's angry thought.

"I met him once only, on business," she said briefly.

Her manner and the blush mystified Miss Derwent.

"But did n't you like him? He used to be the most popular boy. One summer when mother was with me at the island she invited him to come to us, but his vacation had already been bespoken. I should like to renew our acquaintance. Perhaps Judge Trent will ask him here now. I hope so."

This girl had everything, everything. It was n't fair. Sylvia bit her lip to keep back the excited tears. Her host saw the agitation in her face and quickly changed the conversation, talking to Edna of her affairs at Hawk Island, occasionally turning to Sylvia to explain some reference, but giving her the opportunity to keep silence.

At last, to the great relief of one of the company, bedtime arrived.

"Do forgive me for yawning," said Edna, "but I've had a strenuous day with Benny Merritt. I'll warrant the poor boy has been asleep for hours, I worked him so hard; but the cottage is in fine shape and all ready for Miss Martha and me to descend upon it. Oh, you must stay," turning suddenly to Sylvia. "You must come over to Anemone Cottage and make me a visit." Edna did not say a long visit, for the impression made upon her by this mute, cold girl in black was chilling; but she seemed to need cheering, and Edna was prepared to do any missionary work which would be a help to her dear Thinkright.

"Thank you, but I could n't," returned Sylvia hastily. "I could n't, possibly."

"I wonder what is the matter with her?" thought Miss Derwent, as she made ready for bed that night. "Perhaps her bereavement is very recent. At all events, she has come to the right place to be helped."

Sylvia, as soon as she had closed the door of her chamber, went to the window and knelt down with her hot forehead against the cold glass. The stars were twinkling in an invisible sky, and she could hear a rhythmic sound of many waters.

That girl had everything. It was n't fair. She knew Mr. Dunham well. He was popular, he was admired. He was of Edna Derwent's world. She was doubtless popular and admired. What would they both think of Nat? Nat, — stout, red-faced, not too careful of his hands. Sylvia had often demurred concerning his careless habits. Now she knew that they alone made him

impossible. There were many other things that made him impossible, and strangely, they were all points which were the opposite of certain characteristics she had observed in Mr. Dunham during their brief but informal and almost intimate relation. Miss Derwent's speech and pronunciation reminded her sharply of his, and as her thought dwelt upon this enviable girl making ready for her healthful, care-free slumber in the apartment usually sacred to Judge Trent, the burden of Sylvia's vague and helpless future bore down upon her and seemed heavier than she could bear. Long-repressed tears were rising scaldingly to her eyes when she heard a light tap on her door.

It might be she! She should n't come in! With a light bound Sylvia was at the door, pressing upon it.

"Who is it?" she demanded in a choked voice.

It was Thinkright's voice that answered her. "Gone to bed, or sitting up, little one?" he asked.

"Well — I 'm sitting up — so far," she answered, and she opened the door slowly.

"I thought you might be feeling a little homesick, the first night in a strange place," he went on, "and I wanted to say good-night to you once again."

A great, resentful sob rose in the girl's breast, and with a sudden impulse she flung both her arms around his neck.

"Kiss me," she said chokingly. "You kissed her. How did she dare to kiss you!"

Thinkright drew the speaker out into the corridor as he caressed her cheek. "Come downstairs a few minutes," he said. "We might disturb Edna if we talked up here. Can't have you go to bed thinking

wrong," he went on when they had reached the living-room where one tiny lamp still twinkled. "Now sit right down here by me, Sylvia. My heart feels for you. You miss your father, I know, and I wish I could be the comfort to you I'd like to be; but we must all at last find comfort in the great Father of all. We learn little by little that we can't lean on any arm of flesh."

Sylvia bit back her sobs and pressed her eyes. "Poor father is better off," she said. "I would n't want him back. He suffered, and he said there was n't any place for him here any more, — and there is n't for me, there is n't for me!" she added passionately in a voice that shook.

"Wait, little Princess. The King's daughter is distrusting her Father, and pitying herself, Sylvia. That's low thinking, child."

"Of course I pity myself," the girl flashed back, "and ten times more since Miss Derwent came, taking possession of you, and Aunt Martha, and Uncle Calvin. She has everything. Why should she, while I have nothing?"

In the silence that followed Sylvia could see the patient lines in her companion's forehead, and the shining of his deep eyes.

"Except you," she added contritely, clasping her hands around his shabby coat sleeve, "I have you, but it kills me to cling to you like a drowning man, while that girl smiles at you from the top of the wave, — and owns everybody and everything!"

"Edna does some very good thinking," was the quiet response. "Her temptations are different from yours, and she has struggled with them."

"What has *she* to bear?"

"Sickness, — not her own, but that of dear ones, and an overdose of wealth."

"Oh!" The exclamation was scornful and skeptical.

"You remember the tale where the members of a community by common agreement met in the city's public square, and each one laid down his burden, and taking up some one else's went home with it? The story runs that on the following day every man and woman returned to discard the new burden and take up his own again. Supposing Edna took yours" —

Sylvia broke in: "She would be a girl who is a stranger in a strange land with no rights anywhere; whose nearest ones cast her off; who has no future, no money, no home, no plans. A girl who does n't know how to clear a table or wash a dish in her cousin's house, while a strange girl comes in and takes charge of everything. I did n't even know how to kiss you!"

Thinkright smiled. "Edna," he said, "began that when she was twelve years old. It was the year I first came here, and I let her ride on the hay-wagon and gave her the sort of good times she had never known in her life. Her father is a chronic invalid. The doctors recommended the sea, and quiet, and great simplicity of life, so they built Anemone Cottage. Mrs. Derwent is a woman devoted to the world and fashion, but she made heroic efforts to endure Hawk Island for her husband's sake during several seasons. But there was n't any right thinking done in that cottage except what Edna did, a child as happy there as a bird let loose from a cage; and after a while they gave it up. Edna continues to come, every season they 'll let her, and I can assure you, little

one, she needs the refreshment. She needs it. Brave, beautiful Edna!"

The peroration was uttered as an audible soliloquy, and it caused the listener to pull her hand from the calloused palm where it had been clinging.

"Good-night," she said abruptly, and started to rise.

Thinkright seized her arm gently and drew her back beside him. "Just a moment," he said quietly. "You said a minute ago that you had me; as if I counted for something."

"What's the use, when your interest is all wrapped up in that girl?"

"Oh, you poor little thing, you poor little thing!" he murmured.

His thoughtful tone made Sylvia hot.

"And every word I say you despise me more," she flashed forth. "You know you're sorry you came to Boston to get me. I can't be any different; I'm just myself."

"Of course you are. That's the comfort that we have. You'll find yourself some time, and discover a very different being from the one you are conscious of now. I'd like to see you get well, little one, for your mother's sake and your own, and mine."

"I am nearly well," returned Sylvia, surprised at the sudden digression.

Her companion shook his head. "Fevers of body are bad, but fevers of mind are worse. Will you take me for your doctor, child, and let me help you to find the sane, sweet, capable Sylvia Lacey who manifests her inheritance from the Father of us all?"

The girl's eyes grew moist, and she bit her lip. Her

poor, vain sense struggled, but she was sore at the heart which this tone of his always pressed strangely.

"I'd better go away," she said in a voice that trembled.

Her companion placed a kind hand on her shoulder. "If you were to go away, you would not escape from Love," he answered. "Love enfolds you this moment and all moments. It needs only to be recognized and trusted to begin its transforming work in your consciousness. Even life is only consciousness, Sylvia, and you cannot be conscious without thinking. Then what it means to guard the thought, — to think truth, and not falsity!"

"How are we to know when we are thinking truth?" returned the girl, her breast heaving.

"As we are told to judge everything, — by its fruits. The fruit of your thinking has not brought you happiness; then let us get a new set of thoughts. That is all you need to begin with, Sylvia, a new set of thoughts; and you can't get them until you welcome a new guest into your heart." He paused.

"Who? You?" asked the girl.

Her companion smiled. "No, not I, little one. The guest's name is Humility." He waited a moment and then proceeded. "You are entertaining two guests now who are eating you out of house and home; devouring your substance literally. Their names are Vanity and Self-love. Vanity has a thin skin, is very easily injured. The other one whispers to you to hate your aunt and uncle, and to be jealous of Edna Derwent. They can't stay where Humility enters. Take her in. Listen to her. She will whisper to you that it is n't of so much conse-

quence what comes to the Sylvia Lacey you are conscious of at present. She will promise you that if you will listen to her and make her your own, you will learn a happier Sylvia, a better consciousness in God's good time. 'Great peace have they who love His law. Nothing shall offend them.' What a new world you would enter, my girl, when you found that nothing could give you offense!"

A strange wrestling was going on in his listener's breast and her breathing was unsteady. Seeing that she was not ready to speak, Thinkright proceeded: —

"You have heard of the Brotherhood of Man. It is n't a mere phrase when you think right. All, — all of us, children of one Father, all with rights to the same inheritance, what should make us cold or grudging, one toward another? What is to prevent our spontaneous gladness in another's success. His happiness and good fortune become ours. It is all in the family, you see. There are no limitations to be placed on an *infinite* inheritance, are there? Our Father's love is impartial, and all that we ask in His name He has promised to give us. You could n't ask in His name to eclipse Edna Derwent, could you? or to receive any other gift which would appeal to those two guests I hope you will turn out. These are small beginnings of great thoughts, Sylvia, but they point to that 'large place' where your consciousness belongs, and where Love waits to lead you."

The pressure on the door of the girl's heart overwhelmed its resistance. She leaned her forehead against the shoulder so near her. Her breath caught in a sob. "I 'll try," she breathed humbly, "I 'll try."

CHAPTER XI

THINKRIGHT'S LETTER

BACK in the dingy offices of Calvin Trent the sunshine revealed time-honored ink stains and other immovable relics which held their own despite a thorough house-cleaning which Hannah had recently given the rooms.

The judge had apologized to Dunham at the time.

"Until this affair of the Lacey girl is settled," he said, "Miss Martha is liable to come in upon us at any time, and we might as well be prepared."

"By all means," Dunham had responded devoutly. "Unless there is a chemical change brought about in the anteroom I shall be obliged to ask you to attend the door yourself."

This particular sunshiny morning, as John was opening the mail, he found a letter beginning, "Dear Cal:"

It was postmarked Maine, and he passed it over to his employer in silence. Judge Trent was reading the morning paper at the time, and just glancing at his cousin's writing, he clutched the sheet in his left hand and went on with his editorial.

Dunham smiled down at his pile of correspondence. "Absence has n't made the heart grow any fonder," he reflected. "The governor's interest in Curly Head appears to be about where it was."

Then he thought of Miss Lacey and the contrasting

eagerness with which she would greet a letter from Maine. He breathed an involuntary sigh of satisfaction that whatever the bulletin his own responsibility in the matter was over, and that the lesson he had received concerning the unwisdom of rushing in where relatives feared to tread was likely to last during his lifetime.

" 'M, h'm," breathed the judge at last, laying down the paper and setting his hat a little farther back on his head. His thought was evidently still busy with the morning news as his eyes moved vacantly to the letter; but beginning to read, the corners of his lips drew down, not in scorn, but with a movement habitual to him when interested.

He read slowly; even read the letter twice. It ran as follows: —

DEAR CAL, — Laura's little girl was very willing to come up here with me, and I was exceedingly glad to bring her, for poor influences in her life have made her a victim. I've had several talks with her. She has received only a desultory education, and is n't fitted for any life-work. She has been fed on froth mentally, and in Sam's worst straits has evidently never been obliged to do anything more severe in the way of manual labor than to mend her father's clothes; but withal she is innocent and honest, and not to blame, in the absence of a mother or any wise guidance, for not rising higher than her father's standards. You and Martha gave her heart and pride a great shock. Her mother used always to talk much about you in particular, and taught her little girl to kiss your picture good-night. So you can understand the surprise and disappointment of the

sequel. You know what Laura meant to me, and while I would in any case do what I could for this child, it is my pleasure, and in your and Martha's default, seems to be my duty, to assume charge of her. I have determined upon this, for the girl is a starved specimen, and very needy. I tell you this in advance in case the new responsibility should take me away from the farm for any reason, so that all may be understood, and we may be guided. Edna Derwent looked in on us for one night. She says Martha is to be with her again this summer, and bade me beg you to take time to call on her the next time you are in Boston. She is exulting in her summer's prospect of sea, sky, and freedom, in her usual winning manner. Her parents are to travel with friends for some time, leaving Edna to be a child again. She says she is often tempted to feel old and tired."

The rest of the letter was devoted to mention of the farm matters, and Judge Trent glanced through it with a careless frown. The increasing absorption with which he had made his perusal roused Dunham's curiosity. Twice the lawyer's feelings carried him to the pitch of audible expression. His exclamations were brief and monotonous. When he arrived at the point describing his niece's caressing his picture he slowly ejaculated, "*Get* out." And when the matter concerned Thinkright's renouncing his care of the farm the reader made use of the same words, vigorously varying the emphasis thus: "Get *out*."

John speculated upon the information Judge Trent was receiving. Perhaps Sylvia had revolted against being immured on a New England farm and had escaped to Nat.

The judge dropped the letter and stared ahead of him.

Thinkright's implied accusation nettled him more than all Miss Martha's tearful reproaches. For the first time his duty toward his niece presented itself as so reasonable as to be impossible of escape.

He looked at Dunham, who sedulously did not look at him. The young man was thinking of a *mignonne* face as he had last seen it with quivering lips, trying to smile in response to his encouraging parting words. At last the judge spoke: —

"Well, Thinkright took her up there."

"Ah?" responded Dunham. Whatever his curiosity, he determined that his conversation on this embarrassing subject should never exceed monosyllables.

"Sickly looking, is she?" pursued the lawyer after a pause.

"Yes," replied John; then memory reminding him that this was not strictly the case, he availed himself of the remainder of his vocabulary: "and no," he added.

"I should like to know what Thinkright means by her being starved," said Judge Trent irritably.

Silence from Dunham, frowning at his papers.

"I believe I'll send you up there," began the lawyer after a minute.

"I believe you won't," retorted his subordinate with surprising promptness.

The older man stared. "I should like to know how the girl is carrying sail; how she eats, whether she seems contented. An eyewitness, now" —

"Not me," said John briefly.

"Lost your conceit, eh?" asked the judge, grinning.

"No more family parties for me," returned Dunham doggedly.

"Oh, come now, be good-natured and obliging."

"Never again while I live," was the response.

"I've never praised you half enough for your work on that job," said the judge ingratiatingly. "The more I think of it the more I wonder where we'd have brought up in the affair if it had n't been for you."

"You might as well flatter the Sphinx," remarked John impersonally.

Judge Trent laughed. "Afraid of a little girl, eh?"

Dunham shrugged his shoulders. "I should n't be the first man. Why don't you send Miss Lacey?"

"H'm," grunted the judge thoughtfully.

John smiled. "Provide her with a full suit of chain-armor and I fancy she'd accept the detail."

"I'm going in town to-morrow," soliloquized the judge aloud. "I might go and ask Edna Derwent."

"Who?" demanded Dunham, looking up with sudden alertness.

"Edna Derwent."

"Of Commonwealth Avenue?"

"Yes. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I am only surprised that your calling list includes her."

"Well, now, why should you be?"

"No reason, of course," returned John, smiling, "except that she's a girl; and girls, — I thought they were all under the ban. You'll have to take your hat off, you know."

"H'm," grunted the judge again.

"I'll tell you what," suggested John, "send me there. I'll go."

"Do you know her?"

"Used to — well. I have n't seen her for years. It 's her family I referred to when I spoke of friends of mine going up into Casco Bay."

"Yes. Hawk Island."

"That 's the place. I was invited there once, but could n't accept."

"Very nice girl, Edna," remarked the judge.

Dunham emitted a noiseless whistle. "She must be a wonder," he replied. "I did n't know there were any nice girls."

"You think you 're smart, don't you?" said the judge.

"I shall if I get an errand to Miss Derwent to-morrow."

"Then who 's to go to the Tide Mill?" demanded the lawyer.

"You and Miss Lacey, hand in hand. It 's fitting that you should protect one another."

"Miss Lacey lives with Edna Derwent at the island in the summer, — keeps house for her, plays watch-dog, and all that sort of thing."

"Indeed? How small the world is! I knew I felt drawn to Miss Lacey. I 'd forgotten until you mentioned it how I adore Miss Derwent. Do give me the detail, Judge."

"Get out. You can't do that Boston business. I suppose you 'd better mail this letter to Miss Lacey," tossing the missive over to the young man's desk.

"I can take it to her house this evening. I have to go to thank her for my handkerchief that she sent back. Do you want me to — no!" with a sudden turn back to his desk.

"Do I want you to what?"

"Nothing."

"Don't be an idiot!" exclaimed the lawyer, exasperated by his own indecision concerning this affair so foreign to his experience.

"No, it's none of my business," said Dunham.

"Do I want you to ask Miss Lacey if she'll go up to the farm? Yes, I do. Tell her all expenses paid."

After supper that night, for they had supper at six in this rural city of Seaton, John Dunham took a trolley car for the tree-lined street where Miss Lacey's cottage stood behind its row of poplars.

"Utterly inappropriate," mused Dunham, smiling to himself as he glanced up at these "old maids of the forest." "They would be far better placed in front of Judge Trent's. He is a bachelor by conviction."

Miss Lacey saw the young man coming up the walk, and herself opened the door, although she kept a little maid of fourteen, who attended school by day and assisted Miss Martha in her free hours for her board and lodging.

"How do you do, Mr. Dunham?" she said, brow and voice anxious. "I hope nothing bad has brought you."

"Do you call gratitude and admiration bad?" asked John, as she hastily shook hands with him.

"There's very little of either ever walks in this door," returned Miss Martha dejectedly. "Step into the parlor, please. I'll pull up the shades in one minute."

She suited the action to the word, and as she threw open a window the scent of lilacs floated into the room. "These are nice long evenings, are n't they?" she pursued lugubriously. "What are you grateful for, Mr. Dunham?"

"My handkerchief, of course."

"Law! Your handkerchief!" repeated Miss Lacey. "Do sit down."

A swift glance at the spider-legged furniture caused John to choose the haircloth sofa, whose shining surface bulged substantially. He wondered where the judge used to sit. Any of the chairs would have held him, but perhaps they both used this sofa. If so, they must have led a migratory existence; and perhaps its slipperiness had infected and undermined the stability of the judge's affections.

"You did n't need to make any fuss about the handkerchief," added Miss Martha.

"Indeed I should," replied Dunham, immediately conscious of beginning to glide, and anchoring himself with an arm across the mahogany back. "It would be sacrilege ever to use such a miracle of whiteness and shine, with a cameo monogram."

"How foolish," returned Miss Martha, visibly cheered.

"No, indeed," continued John; "I'm going to have it framed and hung where my laundress can use it for a model."

His companion emitted a faint laugh. "I'm glad you can joke," she said, "and it 's real kind of you to come and thank me for such a trifle. Oh, Mr. Dunham, I have n't had a happy minute since that day we were in Boston. I was just now sitting down to write a letter to Thinkright. He does n't know the suspense I'm in. I suppose she 's told him how hateful I was, and he thinks I don't care."

"Yes, a letter came only to-day. Here it is. It was one of my errands to bring it."

"Good news? Oh, is it good news?" Miss Lacey's attitude changed alertly, and she seized the offered envelope.

"I don't know," replied John. "She 's there."

His companion had already torn open the sheet, and was reading greedily.

"Oh, dear — *dear!*" she ejaculated above her breath. At last she looked up. "The judge showed you this, of course?"

"No."

"Then" —

"No, really, Miss Lacey, it's none of my business, you see."

"None of your business, after you 've been so *kind* and taken such an *interest?* I should say it is! Listen."

John brought his teeth together in a resigned sigh while his hostess read aloud, occasionally lifting her eyes to comment. At the close he spoke.

"I was surprised to learn that you and Miss Derwent are friends."

"Oh, you know her?" asked Miss Martha absently.

"Up to a few years ago, I did, very well."

"You can see what opinion Thinkright has of Judge Trent and me."

"Yes," returned John, harking back to his monosyllables.

"No doubt you have the same," said Miss Lacey dismally, "even though I explained to you fully" —

"Well, your mind can be at rest now," returned Dunham. "The young lady is provided for."

"Thinkright is certainly a good man," said Miss Lacey, her brow still drawn, "although he is n't exactly

what folks would call a professor. No one that knows him has a particle of doubt that he means well, and I feel that his notions can't do Sylvia any real harm when he lives such a good life."

"What are his notions? Do you mean that he is a freethinker?"

"Well," responded Miss Lacey, "I don't see how anybody could be *more* free. I should feel that I was tempting Providence to expect everything was coming my way, the way he does. I should expect a thunderbolt instead of prosperity. I told him so once, and he smiled and said then I'd probably get the thunderbolt. He says it's all a matter of what you expect and why you expect it. He asked me if the reason I expected the thunderbolt was because I believed that God was Love. He has n't got a spark of the humility that most good folks know they must have. Why, if every Christian was like him there would n't be a professor left who 'd call himself a poor worm or a sinner. I don't agree with Thinkright, because I'd never be so presuming with my Creator as he is, nor be certain that my Father would n't see fit to send me any afflictions; but I must say he has as lively a dread of sin as anybody I ever knew. There 's no mistake about his being a good soul, and that 's why I don't mind his notions; and, oh, I'm so glad he 's got that flighty child under his wing. She 'll never get any harm from his example, however queer his talk is. Edna Derwent, now, she sympathizes with him, and thinks she gets along a lot better since she 's had his ideas to work on. So," Miss Lacey looked at her caller with a sudden speculative curiosity, "so you 're one of Miss Derwent's satellites, are you?"

Dunham shrugged his shoulders. "I used to be, but I've been so frozen by years of her silence that now I might better be classed among her stalactites. She has a number. I've been trying to get Judge Trent to send me to Boston on business to-morrow and to call on her. He wishes to ask some questions about his niece."

"Does he, indeed?" Miss Martha sat up very straight and her eyes snapped. "Well, it's about time. I guess Thinkright's letter hurt *his* pride a little, too."

"It did seem to stir him. Of course you are both pleased that this friend — this relative of yours has decided to adopt your niece."

"It sounds awfully, — just awfully, does n't it, Mr. Dunham?" returned Miss Lacey, a nervous color mounting in her face. "*Our* niece, and Thinkright adopting her; partly from a romantic feeling which does him the highest credit, — he adored poor Laura, — and partly from duty which I should think would be a sermon to Cal— to Judge Trent." Sudden tears sprang to the speaker's eyes, and she touched them with her handkerchief. "I've condemned myself, for, after all, while I thought I was justified, I certainly did n't stop to think enough from Sylvia's standpoint, I was so afraid I was going to be imposed upon. I'm so grateful to Thinkright, and so grateful to you, Mr. Dunham. What should we have done without you!"

"Oh, don't — don't mention it."

"But I must, I'm so grateful. I wish Judge Trent would send you on some business errand to the farm so that" —

"No, indeed," interrupted John hastily; "but he does want to send you, Miss Martha. He empowered me to

request that you take the trip, permitting him to be at all expense."

"He did, did he?" retorted Miss Lacey, her eyes drying and snapping again. "Well, I should think it was about time he stopped sending folks on that errand," she continued, with a superior contempt for consistency. "It's about time he went himself. I guess he feels pretty small about the whole thing if the truth were known. Is n't that touching about Sylvia's kissing his picture? How did he feel when he read that, Mr. Dunham?"

"Impossible to tell. All he said was 'get out.'"

Miss Lacey's nostrils dilated. "Well," she ejaculated, "all is I know if I'd mar— that is," she added faintly, "I'm glad Laura did n't live to see this day. He has a great deal less excuse than I have, Mr. Dunham, and I have little enough." Miss Martha finished with sincere feeling. "You tell Judge Trent for me, Mr. Dunham, that he had better go to that farm himself."

CHAPTER XII

A LOST OAR

Mrs. Lem's awe of the new Miss Lacey was short-lived. The fact that she came out of that vague locality known as the West seemed to soothe the housekeeper's latent suspicion that the young girl might be "big feeling." Sylvia was reticent even in the presence of Edna Derwent, and this silence could not proceed from snobbishness; moreover, her spirits rose after the departure of the Boston girl, and Mrs. Lem decided that Thinkright's guest was, in spite of her slim height and the dignity of her black garments, only a shy girl who needed encouraging.

"Do you think Miss Derwent's pretty?" she asked Sylvia after Edna had made her adieux.

"Very," answered Sylvia, who was enveloped in the apron the guest had worn the night before, and was awkwardly wiping dishes as the housekeeper washed them. Minty had gone to school.

"I know folks most always think so," said Mrs. Lem, whose pompadour had collapsed with her theories of Sylvia's New York origin; "but I don't know," she went on judicially, "when you come to diagnose Edna's features they ain't anything so great. Her nose would n't ever suit me, — kind of insignificant."

Mrs. Lem's own feature was of the strong Roman

variety. "They're just rollin' in gold," she went on. "It's a wonder to me Edna sets such store by Anemone Cottage when they've got such a luxuriant home in Boston."

Sylvia listened with lowered eyes intently fixed on her work. She had wakened this morning with a sensation of relaxation. Some habitual tense resistance had given way. She was subdued and conscious of relief, as if from a cessation of responsibility. She realized what caused this as her interview with Thinkright rushed back upon her thought. He saw through her. That was her mental admission. He did not admire her at all, and yet for her mother's sake he would not despise her. He had made her view herself in a totally new light.

She had promised him to try to be humble. The thought had mingled with the sea's rhythmic lullaby as it hushed her restless soul to sleep last night. He had offered her a new God who was Love, — his God. One who gave him happiness and content. Why should she resist? Was there really such a God? if so, then He had led her to this unheard-of and unsuspected cousin, the one being in the universe who granted her the right to be, her right to rest in his care and protection.

With the thought came a novel rush of gratitude to the unknown God of whom she had never thought as a friend, a Father, One to count upon. She had turned her head on the pillow last night and buried her eyes with a certain gladness and hope.

In quiet she had sat through the hurried breakfast hour this morning, in serenity had bade the guest good-by, and with a novel ambition had asked Mrs. Lem to be allowed to assist her. A wakened sense, a

new outlook on the world, filled her consciousness now while the housekeeper rambled on.

Edna Derwent had everything. Very well, it was the lesson that Thinkright had set her, to be willing that Edna should have it, to put away that heat of envy which had been like a sharp tooth at her vain heart. In the exaltation that followed yielding herself to the learning of this lesson a sense of humor had little place; so she listened intently to the substance of Mrs. Lem's information with scarcely a smile at its manner.

"I tell you, though, money won't buy everything," went on the housekeeper, scalding a fresh panful of china. "Here's a fresh wiper, Miss Sylvy. Mr. Derwent's ben entirely incapatiated for business or pleasure for years. What good's his money to him? All them luxuriant carriages and high-steppin' charges, — he'd give 'em all, I guess, to be able to walk off ten miles the way Thinkright can, and him his own age."

"It must be hard for Miss Derwent," returned Sylvia, able to-day to accept this idea.

"Jest so," agreed Mrs. Lem. "The more that her mother jest loves society and fine doin's and pines after 'em, so that Edna, who loves both father and mother, is caught betwixt the upper and nether grindstone, as the old sayin' is, and has the life about squoze out of her sometimes."

Sylvia bit her lip. "It's difficult to imagine it," she replied, "when one sees her so bright and happy as she has been here."

"Yes, this is the Hawk Island Miss Derwent. I've heard the other side from Thinkright. I lived over on the island summers when she and her pa and ma used to

be there together, but I never knew any of 'em. I used to see the child rampagin' around the rocks in sneakers and cotton dresses, and her ma readin' to her pa in hammocks on the piazza; but later years she's gone with 'em to waterin' places in Europe. Leastwise that's what folks *say*, though where they'll find any more water than they can here gets me. You know how some folks is. The fishin' 's always better somewheres else. Yes," continued Mrs. Lem sagely, "we don't know what we're doin' when we're envyin' folks. There's a skeleton in most family closets. Most everybody's got somethin' to contend with. I used to think," she lowered her voice, "that the Creator sent 'em for our good. Thinkright says not; so I humor him, and I hope it won't be visited on me. I apologize reg'lar in my prayers at night. It's jest as well to be on the safe side."

Sylvia's grave little mouth broke into a sudden smile, but her eyes were wistful.

"I should love to believe as my cousin does," she answered. "He said we must judge everything by the fruits, and he is so good, so good."

"Yes, Thinkright's fruits is all right," agreed Mrs. Lem, squeezing out her dishcloth. "He ain't any feeble critter either, I tell you. When Judge Trent's here and somethin' goes wrong, and he scowls under them brows o' his, I often feel like sayin' to him, 'Thinkright ain't even afraid of his Creator; and I guess he ain't goin' to care for a few scowls o' *yours*.' Judge Trent gees and haws some, but he always has to come around if Thinkright's sure he's right. There ain't only one thing that man's afraid of, and that's doin' wrong; and though you hain't seen so very much o' the world yet, you'll

find out that's quite an ovation in the way o' lookin' at things."

Sylvia's brain made a vain grasp for the word Mrs. Lem was trying to use. Two days afterward when she was out on the basin in Thinkright's rowboat "innovation" came to relieve her bewilderment.

Minty's lean, strong arms had often rowed her about the little salt lake, but Sylvia was ambitious to be her own boatman; and this afternoon she was practicing by herself, catching crabs and splashing, laughing at her own awkwardness until, breathing fast, her pale cheeks pink from exertion, she pulled in her oars and floated on the blue ripples, looking at the full green of leafy boughs among the sombre richness of the evergreens, and listening to the spring gladness of the robin's songs.

It was all very lovely. The Tide Mill only refused to be cheered. Silent, enduring, wrapped in memories, it stood gray and unapproachable.

"Poor old thing," murmured Sylvia, addressing it. "You're not thinking right." She laughed softly, and ran her hands through her thick curls.

Instantly an oar glided off the boat. She jumped for it, but it was too late. Nearly capsizing, her heart beat as the boat rocked back into safety and she tried to scull after the runaway with the remaining oar. Her inexperience and the clumsiness of the boat baffled her. The floating oar rose and fell, gently increasing its distance, and splash as she might she could not gain upon it.

A curt voice suddenly called from the shore behind her, "Here, girl, girl! Stop that. Be quiet, and probably you'll float in."

She turned involuntarily, and beheld, standing on the verge, a small, elderly man wearing a silk hat and scowling while he motioned to her imperiously.

Obediently she ceased her ineffectual splashing, and the boat danced and floated shoreward.

"Then why does n't the oar float in, too?" she asked anxiously.

"Ask Neptune," returned the stranger curtly.

"I must n't lose that oar," cried the girl.

"Why did n't you take care of it, then?" rejoined the judge, and the boat just then venturing near him and curtsying, he jumped aboard of her with an agility that astonished the passenger. The craft rocked in the shock.

"Sit still," commanded the judge, and Sylvia remained motionless while he seized the oar, and going to the end of the boat, began sculling with a practiced hand, which was at strange variance with his costume.

The trouble in Sylvia's eyes vanished, and two little stars danced therein as she saw by the steady approach of their craft that the lost was as good as found, and so had leisure to gaze furtively at her gondolier. The down-drawn corners of the judge's lips, his shaggy frown at the oar coquetting on the ripples with a breeze which was flapping the skirts of his formal frock coat, and the firm set forward of his high silk hat, formed an incongruous picture.

He took no notice of her gaze. "The currents in this basin," he said half to himself, "are most aggravating."

"They seem to have soured the disposition of the Tide Mill," ventured Sylvia.

"Eh?" returned the judge, glancing down into the

eyes that laughed as mischievously as the small pearly teeth. The sunshine, glinting in the silky curls and brightening them to red, seemed laughing too.

"If you 've never seen the Tide Mill before, do look at it," she went on. "Does n't it seem as if it was refusing to be comforted?"

"It could n't make its salt," remarked the judge briefly.

"Queer, with so much about," returned Sylvia demurely.

The lawyer caught her starry gaze again. He took no notice of her little joke.

"Can you swim?" he asked sternly.

"No," she returned.

"Then you 've no business out here in a boat without some older person."

Sylvia was wearing Minty's blue sweater, and the heated, rosy face above it looked like that of a child. Judge Trent after his unexpected arrival had come down to the Basin to search for the pale and mourning niece concerning whom his conscience had been awakened. He had been looking for the black-clothed figure on the walk, at the moment when the dilemma of the awkward child in the boat had attracted his attention.

"The children of this neighborhood should every one be taught to swim and manage a boat, girls as well as boys," he went on. "They are not. It is a very stupid mistake."

"I do want to learn very much," returned Sylvia meekly. "Minty Foster, a little girl here, has given me one lesson, and I came out to practice this afternoon."

"Minty can row very well," said the judge. "I hope

you've learned a lesson about watching your tools. Experience is a good teacher." As he spoke he reached the runaway oar and snatched it up dripping.

"Oh, I'm so much obliged," said Sylvia. She possessed a dimple in one cheek, and it was very busy while Judge Trent, his lips down-drawn, pushed both oars through the rowlocks beside her.

This accomplished, he sat down in the end of the boat and looked at her. She grasped the oars, wondering what he expected her to do. She felt that it would be a dangerous thing to splash that broadcloth, and she dared not laugh beneath the frowning, speculative gaze.

"I thought I knew all the people around these parts," he said, while Sylvia let the boat float. "I never saw you before."

"I'm a visitor," returned the girl. "Is n't it beautiful here?"

"There is n't any better place in this world," returned the lawyer impassively, "and I doubt very much if there is in the next."

He saw now that his companion was older than he had thought. He recalled, too, that she had made some comment on the Tide Mill.

"What was it you said about the Tide Mill?" he asked.

"Only that it *will* look so sad and unapproachable even when the sun shines like this; as if its feelings had been hurt and it could never pardon or forget."

The judge continued to gaze. He was being penetrated by a suspicion. This girl knew Minty Foster. Supposing —

But he had called on Miss Derwent, and she had

verified Thinkright's description. It was her impression of muteness, pallor, sadness, which had decided the judge to drop his affairs and have a look at the farm. What did Edna mean? What did Thinkright mean? Was it a plot to work on his sympathies? This smiling maid with mischief in her eyes frolicking recklessly in the clumsy old rowboat was the opposite type from the cold, pale specimen he had braced himself to meet in the Basin path. She would have been suitably environed in its changeless sombre firs. This girl, with her length of limb and graceful breadth of shoulder, had greater affinity with the white birches delicately fluttering their light bright greens as they leaned eagerly toward the water and Sylvia.

"The Tide Mill hurt beyond pardon, eh?" he returned. "Well, possibly it *did n't* relish the epithets of the men who sank their money in it."

The flight of fancy was unprecedented for the speaker. He was sensible of unwonted excitement in a possibility.

His companion was still dimpling at the lean figure in the roomy frock coat and high hat.

Laura had been a small woman. The judge was considering that if his companion should rise she would equal or overtop his height.

Starved. Very needy. So Thinkright had put it. Nonsense. This *riante* dryad of the birches could be nothing to him.

"Shows a small disposition, though, after all these years," he added after the brief pause. "Don't you think so? Nursing injuries and bearing malice and all that sort of business?"

The smile died from Sylvia's face. She half averted

it, and trailed her fingers through the quiet ripples. "Thinkright says so," she answered.

And then the judge knew that those young lips so suddenly grave had kissed his picture good-night, that that young head had been pillowed on his sister's breast, and had constituted whatever brightness was in her troubled life.

A strange tightening constricted his throat, for, the temporary heat of the girl's exertion with the oars passing away, he saw her cheeks pale, and it was with a grave glance that she looked at him again. "Do you know Thinkright Johnson?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I suppose he is the best man in the world," she added. "Don't you?"

The high hat nodded again. Judge Trent would not have given unqualified assent to so sweeping an assertion, but, poorer than Dunham on a recent occasion, he had not even monosyllables at his command. It did something novel to him to remember Laura and then picture this girl alone at the Hotel Frisbie.

They floated in silence for nearly a minute, then the judge spoke: "Thinkright has some very good ideas. It's an excellent practice, for instance, to forgive your enemies, and even on some special occasions to stretch a point and forgive your friends."

The young girl looked up at him. If this stranger knew her cousin he could not be quite a stranger. "He is trying to teach me to think right," she said simply. "It seemed at first as if it were going to be easy even though it was different; but, oh, it's hard sometimes! I get sore inside just as my arms used to in the gymna-

sium at school. Father wrote me a note once to get me excused from physical exercise; but," she gave a little laugh and shrugged the shoulders of the blue sweater, "Thinkright won't write me any note of excuse."

"H'm," thought the judge uncomfortably, "I guess she's got some of the Trent old Adam to buck up against." His gaze did not remove from the half-averted head with its sun-crowned, red-gold aureole.

"Who'd have thought Sam Lacey's carrot-top could be made over into that?" he mused.

CHAPTER XIII

UNCLE AND NIECE

For a few moments Sylvia sat absorbed in her train of thought, and suddenly coming to herself, found the stranger's intent gaze upon her. He noted her sudden embarrassment, and hastened to speak.

"Thinkright's worst enemy could never accuse him of preaching what he does not practice," he said.

"Has he any enemies?"

"He's liable to have one in me." The shaggy brows drew down, but the thin, smooth-shaven lips twitched, and the girl saw that the speech had a humorous intent.

She smiled. "Then I shall protect him. He is my cousin."

"Oh, you're related, eh?"

"Yes, and I love him. He is the only one of my relations that I can endure!"

"H'm. Poor relations."

"No, indeed. Rich relations. I am the poor relation, that is the trouble; but — if you know Thinkright you can imagine how he talks to me about it."

"Preaches. I suppose so. Hard on you."

"No." Sylvia shook her head and patted the water with an oar. "He has helped me. He knows wonderful ways of helping people."

"Well, I'll thank him not to send you out in this water in a boat that you don't know how to manage."

The form of the irritable declaration caused Sylvia to view her companion with large eyes.

"Now you 're here you might as well take a lesson," went on the judge. "Try rowing a bit. If you 're going to stay here you 'll need to know how."

"But I 'm not going to stay here," rejoined Sylvia quickly.

"Why not?" The odd little man scowled so intently at her that the girl began to feel uneasy and glanced shoreward.

"If you detest all your other relations and love Think-right then why is n't his home the place for you?"

"It — the trouble is it is n't his home."

"Whose, then?" Judge Trent braced himself in expectation of the answer.

"The farm belongs to — to a celebrated lawyer who uses it for a summer home," replied the girl.

"Make friends with him," suggested the judge.

Sylvia's breath caught. "If — if you knew how I don't want to and how — I must!" she returned naïvely.

Her companion smiled grimly. "Well, here, now, — he 's an old curmudgeon, I know him, — never mind him. Let 's have a rowing lesson. Take the oars, — there, at that point. Now!" The speaker bent toward the young girl, and his dry hands closed over hers. She glanced at him half in fright, and away again as he guided her awkward movements until the boat moved slowly, but with tolerable evenness, through the water. "Now you 're getting it, you see," he said at last.

Sylvia began to forget her embarrassment in interest.

"Not too deep, — only bury the oar." The speaker

glanced up into the eager face so near him. Coral lips pearly teeth, sunny curls, — loneliness, the stage, an actor husband —

"Turn it right there, steadily; see the water drip off? That's the way" —

Himself with his nose buried in a pile of papers, Martha hysterical, Dunham morose, but himself always unmoved. Laura's baby! He remembered that he had sent her a silver cup when she was born.

"Look out, a steady pull, — steady. That's enough now. You're tired. This boat is a tub. You should have a light one."

Sylvia laughed, and let her teacher pull the oars across the boat.

"Now we'll float a while," he said, resuming his seat in the bow. "So Thinkright wants you to forgive everybody; love everybody, eh? I know that's his tack."

Sylvia was breathing fast from her exertions. "Yes," she nodded. "I've never had much practice in loving people."

"No? That's the Trent in you."

She lifted her eyes in surprise at the abrupt reply. He nodded. "You said Thinkright's your cousin, then so is Judge Trent."

"Uncle," returned Sylvia briefly.

"Ah. One of the detested."

She lifted her shoulder with a gesture of dread. "I must n't say so," she answered.

He watched her through a moment of silence.

"I wish you luck getting over it," he remarked dryly. "It's against you — being a Trent."

"But," said the girl simply, "Thinkright says if I'll

only keep remembering that I have n't any relations except God, and His children, I shan't find anybody to hate."

The judge's eyes snapped. "H'm. I hope there 's something in that. I hope there is. I've never paid much attention to Thinkright's little pilgrimages among his rose-colored clouds, but perhaps it might be to my advantage to do so; perhaps it might. The fact is, girl, — I 'm sorry to confess it because I know it will be unwelcome news, but — I 'm your Uncle Calvin."

Sylvia grasped the side of the boat, grew pale, and stared. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "He has a full beard. He has a round face."

"Once upon a time, as the story books say, he had."

The girl's eyes closed and her lips compressed.

"Sylvia, remember the Tide Mill." The judge's voice was rough with feeling. "Your eyes look like its shuttered windows. I 'm not a monster. I 'm only a human machine that did n't know how to stop grinding. I 've come up here to tell you so. I thought our introductions were better made away from the family, and I expected to find you walking in the woods."

Sylvia opened her eyes again, widely, apprehensively. "Is Aunt Martha here, too?"

"No. I thought one of us would be sufficient. I saw Miss Derwent in Boston recently. She gave me news of you."

"Uncle Calvin," began the girl in a low, uneven voice, "I have said very uncivil things. Why did you deceive me?"

"I had no idea at first that you were my niece. I looked for some one totally different."

Sylvia's heart was beating with unwonted quickness. This was the man who had been willing to pay frugally for her living until she could make one for herself, while too indifferent even to see her; but Thinkright's talks had turned a searchlight upon her own predilections and expectations, with the effect of distracting her attention somewhat from the shortcomings of others. Her present excitement in the discovery of her uncle was mingled with mortification at the remembrance of what her thought had once demanded of him. The boat rocked gently over the blue ripples; the sunshine illumined alike the burnished greens of grass and foliage and the weather-beaten pallor of the implacable Tide Mill. The shrewd, lined face under the high hat kept piercing eyes on the youthful, drooping countenance opposite.

"Yes, you 're totally different from what I expected," he said again. "You 're no more like your mother than I am."

She flashed a suddenly suspicious glance up at the speaker. "I am proud to be like my father," she declared.

The judge shrugged his shoulders, and the girl continued hotly: "I've come to a place where no one has a kind thought or word for him. I love him twice as much as before."

"H'm," grunted Judge Trent. "Even Thinkright draws the line there, does he? Should n't wonder. Sam Lacey carried Laura off under his very nose."

"Thinkright does n't talk about him," returned the girl; "but that speaks volumes."

"I'm not going to, either. I'm glad you loved him, and that you still do; and now let's see what can be

done in our situation. Practically you detest me, but theoretically you love me *à la* Thinkright. Is that about the size of it?"

Sylvia wiped her eyes and gave an April smile.

"Now," went on the judge, "supposing we take the latter clause as our working hypothesis. We're both Trents and chock-full of old Adam. I've never had any use for girls, and you have no use for old clams of uncles who keep their heads in their shells when they ought to be coming up to the scratch; but, after all, what's the good of hating one another?"

"It's no good," responded Sylvia quickly.

"Well, then, supposing you let me in on the rose-colored cloud proposition, too."

Sylvia's reply was a question. "Did you really come up here on purpose to see me?" she asked.

"I did, indeed. Ought to be back in the office this minute. Dunham — you know Dunham by the way — will have troubles of his own before I can get back."

"How is Mr. Dunham?" asked Sylvia, again splashing the water gently with an oar.

"As well as could be expected of such a fragile flower. He's straining at the leash now to get to Boston to call on Miss Derwent. I expect my arrival at the office will be the signal for a cloud of dust in which he will disappear, heading for the first train. A very fine girl, too. I'm glad you met her. If I ever admired girls — except when I'm walking on rosy clouds — I should admire her."

"I knew you did!" exclaimed Sylvia, with a little pinch at the heart.

"You knew it, why?" asked the lawyer blankly.

"I don't know. I felt it."

Judge Trent bit his lip in a certain grim amusement. His niece, then, sometimes did him the honor to think about him still, even though she had ceased to kiss his picture.

"I'm a very jealous person," declared Sylvia frankly, looking up at him, "and vain and selfish and lazy. It's as well for you to know it."

"Indeed? So Thinkright has impressed upon you that open confession is good for the soul, eh?"

"Oh — Thinkright!" ejaculated Sylvia, with a sudden start. "I forgot. It's all wrong to say those things even about one's self."

Judge Trent nodded. "I've heard that contended. Somebody says that self-condemnation is only self-conceit turned wrong side out."

"Yes." Sylvia nodded. "I suppose from any standpoint it's still talking about yourself; but I did n't mean that. He says we must n't say such things because it fastens the wrong more tightly to us. Of course if we do wrong we have to own it and repent, but," — Sylvia heaved a great sigh. "That's only the beginning, the easiest part. It's *doing* differently and not in the old way that's hard, — *not* thinking and doing jealous, vain, selfish things." She patted the water again thoughtfully.

"Well, give me a hand up, Sylvia. I'm an old dog, but perhaps upon occasion I can bound into the rosy clouds to stroll with you."

Sylvia shook her head knowingly. "If you do bound up you'll find you have struck something more substantial than clouds; and the rose-color may appear, — yes, it *is* there," she interrupted herself with sudden

conviction. "I've perceived it in flashes, but" — her voice sank, and she shook her head again, — "it does n't seem rosy all the time."

"Well," returned the lawyer, "there's a certain amount of reassurance in the fact that you won't dare detest either me or Miss Lacey."

At the latter name color flashed over the girl's face, and she stretched out her hand impulsively. "Oh, it's so hard to love Aunt Martha," she cried.

The judge pursed his lips, averted his eyes, and rubbed his chin the wrong way.

"I suppose you do," she continued dejectedly.

"We-ll," he returned, his sharp eyes resting on the pointed firs, — "from the rosy-cloud altitude, of course, of course."

"Then you don't like her?" cried Sylvia hopefully.

"Of course I do," returned the lawyer hastily. "Most certainly. A very fine woman; a capable woman in every way." As he spoke he scanned the banks uneasily, as though fearing that Martha might have repented of her refusal to come in his place, and had followed him. "She is most worthy of respect and — and" — his voice trailed away into silence. "Give her a hand up, too, Sylvia," he added after a moment, "and we'll all let bygones be bygones together. What do you say?"

"It's easier to have you with me, Uncle Calvin," returned Sylvia naïvely.

The judge felt the embarrassment of guilt. This was the result of his leaving Martha to bear the heat and burden of Hotel Frisbie alone. Hers had been the hours of tears and anxiety. He had kept on the even tenor of his legal way, troubling himself about nothing, and his

negative misdemeanors were less heavily visited upon him. Compared to himself Martha was innocent; and it was the way of the world that such should suffer always with the guilty, and sometimes even in their place. He told himself, however, that his tenure on the situation was too light to be risked. He took ignoble refuge in generalities.

"Don't rely too much on first impressions, Sylvia. Your Aunt Martha has grieved about you. Remember, 'to err is human, to forgive divine.' Moreover," — the speaker's lips twitched again, — "what will Thinkright say if you refuse her standing-room on our cloud? Consider well!"

Sylvia smiled through bright drops.

"Now, then, change seats with me," continued the judge, "and I'll row you in."

At the same moment Thinkright, having been absent for hours on some errand, was being greeted on his return by Mrs. Lem, who came out to the doorstep to meet him.

"Guess who's come," she said.

He looked up inquiringly. "Is Miss Derwent back again?"

"No. You'd never guess who it is this season o' the year. It's Judge Trent."

"Where is he?"

"Went down to the basin to find Miss Sylvy."

"Oh, did he?" Thinkright smiled in his interest.

"Yes. Kind of a touchin' meetin', I expect," remarked Mrs. Lem, lifting her pompadour and sighing sentimentally. Judge Trent had surprised her in a state of sleek and simple coiffure; but no sooner had his high

hat disappeared down the hill than she flew into the bedroom and remedied the modest workaday appearance of her head; nor would the pompadour abate one half inch of its majestic proportions until he took his train back to Boston. She hoped she knew what was due to the lord of all he surveyed.

"How long has he been gone?" asked Thinkright.

"Oh, the best part of an hour, I should say."

"Then he must have found her," remarked the other, still with his speculative smile.

"Yes, indeed, and I hope she 'll bring him home soon. It 's real raw on the water to-day in spite of the sun, and the judge's bronicals ain't jest as strong as they might be."

"Oh, Mrs. Lem, Mrs Lem," laughed Thinkright quietly, entering the house and hanging up his hat.

"There they come now!" she exclaimed, herself hastily retreating into the kitchen.

Thinkright looked out to see Sylvia's uncovered bright head level with the judge's high hat as they strolled up the hill. The lawyer's hands were clasped behind his back, and Thinkright augured peace from the deliberation of the strollers.

He met them at the door. Sylvia's grave face changed to a pensive smile at sight of him, and Judge Trent gave his cousin's hand a dry, short shake.

"How are you, Thinkright? See if you can't find a light boat and manageable oars for Sylvia in this vicinity. I found her catching crabs and losing oars at a great rate down there, and splashing herself till she resembled a mermaid. Hello, Minty," for here the child drew her doubtful and reluctant feet into the room, her

wide eyes always a little shy at first of the brusque and powerful man in the high hat. "I have something for you." The judge began feeling in his coat pocket. "I bought you a bag of gumdrops, and regret that I forgot and have been sitting on them all the afternoon." He produced the paper bag. "Fortunately, they are the durable brand for sale at the village and warranted to withstand any pressure. At worst they will be lozenges now."

"Why did you surprise us?" asked Thinkright, as Minty beamingly accepted the striped bag. "Why did n't you let me send the team over?"

"Oh, you know I'm a creature of impulse," returned the lawyer, with his dry smile; "I acted with my usual lack of calculation. Made up my mind to come one minute, and took the train the next."

Thinkright did not reply, but glanced toward Sylvia, who was pulling the blue sweater off over her head.

CHAPTER XIV

BLIND MAN'S HOLIDAY

Upon Judge Trent's return to town John Dunham did not disappear in a cloud of dust to make his call on Miss Derwent. He took the precaution to telephone, and discovered that she was out of the city.

He felt considerable curiosity regarding his employer's experiences at the farm, but true to his new and safe policy he asked not a single question. Business required the judge's immediate attention upon his arrival, but as soon as affairs in the office quieted he remembered the promise he had made Dunham.

"Now then, boy," he said one morning, "there is n't any reason why you can't run along to-day and call on Miss Derwent."

"The bird has flown. I 'phoned to the house. She has gone to New York to be a bridesmaid. Is n't coming back till time to leave for Maine."

"H'm. Too bad," returned the judge absent-mindedly.

"Thank you. Don't let it depress you."

"Eh?" looking up; Dunham was bending over the morning mail.

"Ever been in that Casco Bay region?" went on the judge.

"Yes, I yachted along the coast from Bar Harbor to Portland one summer."

"It's a fine, unspoiled part of the world," remarked the lawyer with unusual pensiveness, setting his hat farther back from his forehead and looking into space. "When I get a glimpse of it as I did this week, I'm tempted to hasten my retirement, to bid farewell to the squabbling world, and turn fisherman, — begin to spread nets for mackerel instead of my fellow men, and trap only such lobsters as will blush in a pot instead of in court."

"Hear, hear," said Dunham. "You must have had good weather up there, — or else," he added, "fallen in love with your niece."

Judge Trent still looked into space. "Yes," he went on slowly, "move my books to the Mill Farm, leave Hannah the house, but not my address, and begin rising at 4 A. M. for breakfast with Cap'n Lem. Then row out to my pound, take in the fish, and send them to Boston. What retaining fee could compare to the satisfaction of making money that way? Think of the sights and sounds, the peace of mind!"

"Yes," said John, "but consider the obstacles."

"There would n't be any. I'd leave the good will of the office to you."

"I'm very grateful, but you forget. What would any well-regulated fish say to afternoon dress at 4 A. M., and would n't the wind blow your hat off?"

"John, you 're a frivolous youth," responded the judge thoughtfully; "but," in a warmer tone, "there are some things you do very well. I" — still more warmly — "I have a little commission for you this afternoon."

Dunham looked up suspiciously.

"It happens very nicely that you don't wish to go to

Boston to-day. I think it is due Miss Lacey that she should receive news of her niece's welfare. She knows I've been up there and" —

"Yes, she does know it," interrupted John with emphasis. "She is waiting with great eagerness to hear your report."

"Precisely," returned the judge mildly. "Now I'll tell you all about it."

"Why do you tell me?" inquired Dunham firmly.

"How can you tell Miss Lacey if I don't?"

"I'm not going to tell her."

"Why not? You've been there once."

"My dear Judge Trent," began John impressively, "I was late in coming to it, I know; but I have lately been turning my talents to minding my own business" —

"Which is mine," put in Judge Trent. "It's what I engaged you for."

"Well and good, but not to attend to your pleasures," retorted John, with a grin; "your family and domestic affairs. You will naturally visit Miss Lacey this afternoon. You could n't do less."

The judge scowled. "I might call her up on the 'phone," he said gloomily.

"You might," returned John, "if you could send her a mind wave which would draw her to the corner grocery. I have had one appointment made by postcard, to speak to her at the corner grocery."

"Call it up, then, and ask them to send for her," commanded the judge curtly.

"Certainly, if you say so," responded Dunham, "but don't you think if she got you on the wire from there, her conversation might be too entertaining and instruc-

tive to the listeners? Her methods at the 'phone are — unusual. The day we talked I heard her distinctly through the window as well as over the wire."

Judge Trent groaned. "I have n't crossed her threshold in ten years, but I suppose I shall have to do it if you 're going to be so confoundedly obstinate and disobliging."

"Certainly," returned Dunham smoothly. "It 's time such unneighborly habits were broken up. And say, Judge, ask her to feel round and find out if Miss Derwent does n't want to see me at her island this summer."

"H'm. Trust you among those lobster traps?" returned the judge irascibly. "Never. I feel some responsibility to your family."

As Miss Lacey said afterward, it was the greatest mercy that she was n't out that evening. She had been inclined to go over to Selina Lane's to get a skirt pattern, but some trifle had prevented her setting forth, so that she sat rocking gently in her sitting-room, enjoying blind man's holiday at about eight o'clock, and reflecting on the contents of a letter from Miss Derwent which she held in her lap, when she saw in the dusk an unmistakable figure turn in at her gate.

"Calvin!" she exclaimed, and surprised color mounted to her forehead as she rose to open the door.

"No lights. I thought you were out," was Judge Trent's greeting.

Now Miss Lacey knew from the etiquette column in "The Ladies' Friend" that it was *de rigueur* to allow a gentleman caller to take care of his own hat, but, as she reflected in a lightning flash, that authority on manners and morals in "The Ladies' Friend" had never met

Judge Trent. The reluctance with which he now yielded up his boon companion vindicated her lack of confidence. She deposited it on the hall table.

"Step right in, Calvin," she went on. "I hardly know how to wait for your news. I'll light the lamp in an instant." She proceeded to do so, conscious of a fleeting wish that the visitor would note the brightness of the chimney and clearness of the flame, and read a lesson to Hannah. She breathed a sigh as she realized the hopelessness of the aspiration.

The judge was standing, waiting in silence for her to be seated. No movement or expression showed that the objects about him bore different associations from those connected with his office furniture, and if she took her seat on the haircloth sofa with an idea that he would join her she was disappointed. He parted his coat-tails and perched upon a straight-backed structure of mahogany, usually avoided by every caller.

"Well, Martha, I have n't much to tell. She 's very pretty."

"I told you so, Calvin. I told you that was the trouble."

"Precisely. In addition I must say she has very little use for us, — for you and me."

Miss Lacey shook her head mournfully. "How did she treat you? Did she flash up and snap her eyes?"

"No, she shut them with a sort of a take-it-away expression."

"But she is safe now, is n't she? You will let her stay at the farm, won't you?"

"Yes, of course," returned the judge.

"Does she look so ill and pitiful?"

"No, she's picking up. She seems perfectly contented under Thinkright's wing."

"You don't know what that means," returned Miss Martha fervently. "After that dreadful talk about the stage, and marrying actors, I did n't know as she'd be willing to stay in the country with a plain man like Thinkright."

"She does n't think he's plain. She considers him a mixture of Adonis and Solomon."

"Very well. Whatever *you* may see fit to do, Calvin, *I* shall thank God on my bended knees," declared Miss Martha devoutly. "To think that her immortal soul is n't lost and our two families disgraced through our — *own* — *fault*, is a blessing we don't either of us deserve."

"Rub it in, Martha, rub it in," returned the judge.

"No, I'm not one of the nagging kind. I don't intend to rub it in, but I'll own it, once and for all. Go on, please. What else?"

Judge Trent waved his hands. "Nothing else, practically."

"Why, there must be a lot more to tell. If *I'd* been the one to go up there I should have a thousand things to tell you."

The lawyer raised one devout glance toward the ceiling. "I'm sure of it, Martha; but you know the limitations of a mere man. Beside, I suppose pretty soon now you will be seeing for yourself. Miss Derwent said she should go early this season."

"Why, yes. Next week. I just received the letter today. It comes as a surprise, and I shall have to hurry, getting ready to close my house. Edna had n't expected to be free so quickly, but her parents' plans have

changed, and so hers can. She 's been up at the farm, too, and seen Sylvia, you know."

"Yes. We all know Sylvia now," returned the judge with grim humor.

"Oh, I wish you would tell me more," begged Miss Martha. "Did she treat you decently before you came away?"

"Oh, yes. You know Thinkright's peculiar notions. His hell-fire is right here or nowhere, and he 's been teaching Sylvia how to keep her toes out of the flames, — how to climb up out of these lowlands of sorrow. She was pretty well stranded after years of vagabond life. Excuse me, Martha, but we all knew Sam; and after our rebuff she was in a fit state to swallow Thinkright's cheerful theories whole. I don't claim much knowledge of what I can't see or touch, but it would n't surprise me if the Power that Is let us sidetrack ourselves on purpose to put Sylvia in Thinkright's care. I should n't have known how to handle the results of Sam's training, and if you 'd had the job I suspect you 'd have begun at the outside and tried to teach the girl habits of order and all that. Thinkright and I sat up late one night talking the matter over. Sylvia would have driven you to drink, and you would have driven her to join a traveling circus."

"Calvin!" interrupted Miss Martha, gasping. "I 'm a white ribbon" —

"You are, Martha, without a spot or stain; but it would n't have been any use to try to veneer Sylvia, as it were. Now these remarks are not opprobrious. They are designed to comfort you for the apparent mistakes of the trip to Hotel Frisbie. Things have

come out better than we could have arranged them. Sylvia's guardian angel was holding Thinkright in the background, like a trump card, as you might say" —

"No, I might n't, Calvin Trent! You 're saying the most awful things!" exclaimed Miss Lacey.

"Well, you 'll be up there in a few days," remarked the judge, rising. "I just wanted to assure you that Sylvia is doing well, and that you can be perfectly tranquil about her; so good-by, Martha. I hope you will have a satisfactory summer."

"We shall see you at Hawk Island, of course," returned Miss Lacey, as they shook hands. "Edna always counts on it, you know."

"It will perhaps do quite as well if I send Dunham. He is accustomed to representing me."

"Oh, is he coming to the Tide Mill?" asked Miss Martha in pleasant surprise.

"There 's no telling. I suppose he 'll have to take a vacation somewhere. Young men are so unreasonable nowadays. Imagine me at his age kiting off to the seashore."

"Why, I'm sure," returned Miss Martha with some consciousness, "we used to enjoy those drives to Swampscott very much."

"Another incarnation. That was another incarnation," responded the lawyer quickly, passing into the hall where he pounced eagerly upon the hat from which he had endured such ruthless separation. Saying good-by once more, he departed.

Miss Lacey watched him disappear into the star-lit, fragrant night.

"If *I'd* married him," she murmured, "he would n't wear a coat after it was shiny at the seams."

Her heart was beating a little faster than usual, and her cheeks were warm as she closed the door.

CHAPTER XV

A FLITTING

On an orthodox June morning, rare and radiant, but verging on a heat which increased Miss Lacey's appreciation of her happy destiny, she turned the key of her house.

Her carpets were rolled up, and her curtains rolled down; her thin, worn, solid silver was packed in a neighboring attic. Nothing portable of any value was left for a marauding hand, and, moreover, the neighbors on both sides always willingly kept an eye on Miss Martha's interests. They rejoiced generously in that summer work of hers, which she assured them was just play. One summer, several years ago, it had been generally known among Miss Lacey's friends that she had been ailing for some time. Judge Trent was abroad that season, and he made a suggestion to Thinkright, which resulted in an invitation to Miss Martha to visit the Mill Farm. It was then that she made the acquaintance of Edna Derwent, who, when the girl came to need a companion in her playhouse, remembered the smart, stirring woman who had been so happy in the peace and quiet of the locality. The result was several summer outings for Miss Martha, and she never knew that she owed them to the man with whom she had just missed spending her life.

Serene in the safety of her niece, and of her goods, and in the prospect before her, she waited at the station for the train to Portland. Her gray lisle-thread gloves were new, so was her tissue veil and her straw hand-bag. She was conscious that she looked genteel, and her mental sky was as cloudless as the firmament above her while she watched the train draw into the station. She scanned each platform as the cars slowly passed, and soon her search was rewarded by the sight of Miss Derwent's brown-clothed figure and the eyes that laughed a response to the eager face below. Miss Martha trotted briskly up the steps.

"Here you are, my dear. What a day! Did you remember to send that grocery list to Shaw's? Did Jenny come? Oh, yes. There she is. How do you do, Jenny?" greeting Edna's cook, whose stolid rosy face gazed from the chair opposite the one to which Miss Derwent led her friend.

All the way to Portland Miss Martha's tongue kept pace with the velocity of the train. The one subject upon which it halted was her niece. She longed to know all that Edna could tell her, but she hesitated to reveal how slight was her own knowledge.

She cleared her throat before speaking tentatively.

"Judge Trent tells me you saw my niece at the farm."

"Yes, indeed," replied Edna. "I begged her to stay long enough for me to have the pleasure of bringing you together, but she felt that she could n't do so."

Miss Lacey flushed. "Oh, we 've met, you know," she replied.

"Indeed? I did n't understand, then."

"Oh, certainly. Of course I met her in Boston when

she came on from the West. Judge Trent," — Miss Martha swallowed and moved uneasily, — "it was n't exactly convenient for him to go into the city that day. He 's just now been up to the farm to see Sylvia, — and of course *my* visit with her was very hurried and — unsatisfactory." Miss Martha swallowed the obstacle in her throat again, whatever it was. She had a vague idea that her conscience was rising in revolt against the impression she was endeavoring to make. She was wont to say that some folks might have consciences that spoke in still small voices, but that hers was the yelling kind. On this occasion she repressed it firmly, although the effort reddened her cheeks still further. Conscience or no conscience there were moments when consideration for the proprieties should be paramount.

She continued: "Possibly Sylvia told you that she was still convalescing from a severe illness when she was called upon to pass through the sorrow of losing her dear father, — a very artistic, unpractical soul, my poor brother, — and really it was a mercy the judge had the farm to send her to. Thinkright was of course ready to take her, as he is for every good word and work, and it has turned out so well. He and she have taken the greatest fancy to one another " —

"Then is she there still?" asked Edna, as Miss Lacey paused for a hasty selection of further detail.

"Yes, indeed. We should n't think of allowing her to leave, and," very confidentially, "I don't know whether you ever heard of the romance of Thinkright's life?"

Edna shook her head. Miss Martha nodded hers impressively. "Yes. Sylvia's mother. Mh'm. There 's

something quite touching about this outcome. He seems to consider that he has almost adopted Sylvia,—that she belongs to him."

Edna gave a little exclamation. "Any girl would be fortunate to belong to Thinkright," she returned.

"Yes, indeed. He's a good man, and the judge and I feel perfectly easy"—Miss Martha used that form of speech with subtle satisfaction—"to leave her with him. Of course we're three lone, lorn people, and Thinkright's less closely related to the child than we; but neither the judge nor I would feel it right"—here conscience reared until it threatened to stop her speech altogether. "Will you wait till your advice is asked?" she demanded in fierce, silent parenthesis. Then with a vigorous swallow she finished her sentence,—"feel it right to take her away from him."

Miss Martha leaned back in her chair flushed and guiltily content. She had made her impression, and she was willing to pay for it with vigils if necessary.

"The girl certainly could n't be in a better place for either mind or body," returned Edna thoughtfully, looking out the window; "but I wonder, since you tell me this, why the evening I was there she was so insistent about going away."

Miss Martha recalled vaguely a quotation concerning the swiftness with which a start in deceit becomes a tangled web.

"You see, she was n't real well," she returned, "and I suppose she had fancies; but I'm expecting to find her settled and happy by this time. She certainly would be excusable if she was a little notional and restless at first." Then with one deep breath she changed the subject.

"I wonder, Edna, if we're going to need a new cook stove this summer?"

Miss Derwent rose to the fascinating bait. She considered it enchanting to live in a house where she could be acquainted with the cook stove; and Miss Martha felt that she had sheered off the thin ice upon solid ground at last.

Arriving in Portland, they took a carriage and drove about, attending to their list of errands, in that charmed air which makes the procession of doctors' signs which lines Congress Street appear an incomprehensible paradox to the exultant, anticipating summer folk.

At last the little party boarded the island steamer, and though a light fog blew in from the sea, it failed to dampen the spirits of Miss Derwent and her chaperon. Even Jenny, the cook, drew a blanket shawl around her, and remained on deck. There was a certain stalwart fisherman at Hawk Island whose image had not been blotted out by the pale suitors of her winter.

The deep roar of the breakers below Anemone Cottage had been wont to have a depressing effect on Mrs. Derwent, and was one of the chief causes of the devout relief she experienced in bidding a permanent farewell to Hawk Island. The green field which lay at the back of the house, in front billowed across to masses of rock leading sixty feet downward to the bottle-green water, churned at this point into a constant unrest by its never ceasing attack upon the gray confusion of points and ledges.

Calm as the sea might be, it never fell entirely quiet here; and as the wind and tide rose, the seething and spouting of foam and spray whitened the entire coast,

the rising and bursting of the breakers being accomplished with a thunderous booming which was inspiring music in Miss Derwent's ears.

To-day Benny Merritt was at the wharf with a carriage to meet the newcomers, and he drove them to the cottage under a running fire of questions from Miss Derwent, to which his slow drawl replied with relish.

Miss Lacey was a necessary accompaniment to Miss Derwent, and she therefore dwelt in a reflected light, which made her fussy catechisms and exactions endurable.

"Oh, hear it, hear it!" cried Edna, as the horse pulled up the green ribbon road which led to the cottage. "It's always high tide when I come. I'm the luckiest girl in the world. Hear it, Miss Lacey."

"How can I help hearing it?" returned Miss Martha mildly.

"Is n't it superb!" insisted Edna, looking over the miles of rocking blue as though for the first time.

"Oh, yes, I don't mind it. That is, yes, indeed, it is splendid, Edna. Benny, why have n't you taken off those back shutters?"

Miss Derwent laughed softly. Miss Martha often told people that the surf did not affect her at all disagreeably, and Edna's experience had taught her to appreciate this. After all, it was a good thing to have some one about who could think of shutters, even though the fog had drawn back to a low, smoke-colored fold that softly encircled the horizon, and the gulls were cresting the waves with their white wings.

CHAPTER XVI

EVOLUTION

It was only when they had guests at the Mill Farm that a seven o'clock breakfast was served, and as yet Sylvia was accounted one of that privileged class. Thinkright had asked her when she arrived at what hour it was her custom to breakfast, and she had shrugged her shoulders.

"Father and I never liked to take it before nine o'clock," she said, "but it made the landlady so cross that when we owed for board we usually tried to get down by half past eight."

Thinkright smiled at this. "Here you can go to bed earlier," he returned. "We will try breakfast at seven o'clock." Sylvia looked somewhat aghast, and it was not for some time that she discovered what a concession had been made in her favor.

One morning, a fortnight after Judge Trent's visit, she came out on the stone step at the kitchen door to scent the morning, while Mrs. Lem scoured the cooking dishes.

Cap'n Lem came along. His red face with its white fringe beamed kindly upon her under the old straw hat.

"Wall, now, you're lookin' smaht, Sylvy," he said, as he paused. "Beginnin' to look real kind o' sassy and rosy. I guess they use ye pretty well here." His

shrewd blue eyes twinkled at her, and he gave a sharp nod of satisfaction. "Should n't wonder if you 'd be gittin' up in the mornin' some o' these days."

"Oh, I do," replied Sylvia. "It 's no trouble for me any more. Mrs. Lem let me make the coffee this morning, and we all sat down at seven o'clock promptly. Where were you? I don't believe I've seen you at breakfast since I've been here."

The old man's shoulders heaved in his toothless laugh. "Seven o'clock," he said scornfully. "Yew look through a knot-hole in your floor any mornin' when it 's handy to four o'clock and yew 'll see my breakfast doin's."

Sylvia opened her eyes, genuinely bewildered. "But why do you want to get up in the night?" she asked.

"Night!" he repeated. "What ye talkin' abaout? It 's jest the hahnsomest time o' the hull day. I git up to go to the pound, o' course."

"The pound?" Sylvia stared in wonder. "Do you lose cows every day?"

"Cows! What ye talkin' abaout?"

"Why, you said pound. That 's for lost cows and dogs, is n't it?"

Cap'n Lem stared a moment, and then cackled merrily.

"So 't is, some places," he answered. "Geewhitaker! I must tell Lucil that!" His eyes disappeared. When he could open them again he went on: "I never give a thought to that afore. My pound 's a net aout in the fishin' ground; an' I go an' haul it every mornin'."

"Oh, may I go with you some time?" asked Sylvia eagerly.

"Sure ye kin." Cap'n Lem slapped his leg and burst forth again. "Haw, haw, haw, Sylvy. Mebbe we'll find some lost sea cows and dogfish caught out there. No knowin'. Well, anyway, I'm glad to see sech a change come over a gal in a few weeks as there has over you. Yes, indeed, you'll be gittin' up in the mornin' some day. It beats all how folks kin stay in bed. I've took garden sass to the Derwents' to Hawk Island, and I've found 'em eatin' breakfast at half past eight. Why, it's jest as easy fer us to git up as 't is for the cawtage folks to lay."

"Do you mean to say that everybody would get up here if it were n't for me?" asked Sylvia disconcerted.

"Wall, Thinkright's allers done his chores afore he sits down with yer; but Lucil, she's kind o' cawtage folks-y in her feelin's. When my woman was alive I allers did git my own breakfast anyway, and let her lay as long as she wanted, and so I do Lucil. Jes' as like as not she lays till half past five o'clock."

"Well, probably it's because you go to bed so early that it's easy for you."

"No, I don't," replied Cap'n Lem promptly. "Lots o' times when I've had a real wearin' day I feel like settin' up to rest in the evenin'. Time an' ag'in I hain't shet my eyes afore nine o'clock."

Sylvia's small teeth gleamed in her prettiest smile. After all, what was the difference between dining at seven and retiring at eleven, and supping at five o'clock, as they always did at the Mill Farm, and retiring at nine?

"Well, I think it's my duty to make you and my cousin Thinkright more lazy," she said.

The old man shook his head. "I don't cal'late to call myself lazy s' long's I don't git one o' these here motor boats fer fishin'. Let a man use one o' them three years, and by that time he's got to hev an auto*mo*bile to git from the house to the boat. They're a good thing fer religion though, 'cause they make a man so mad he can't swear. I'm lazy to what I used to be," continued Cap'n Lem after a meditative pause, "when I used to fish all day and then row all night in a calm to git the ketch to market. Tell ye that wuz workin' twenty-five hours out o' the twenty-four; and when a man does that he'd ought to git a life-sentence, and if he outlives it he'd ought to be hung." The speaker took off his hat and fanned himself. "It's a-goin' to be some scaldin' to-day, Sylvy."

The girl laughed. "Then when I carry the milk down cellar I shall stay there. It's so funny to have the cellar under the parlor as it is here."

"'T is out o' the common, but the ground was so shoal at the kitchen end it hed to be dug that way. Judge Trent hed that cellar made. I visited him once to Seaton. Did he ever tell ye?"

"No."

"Well, you'd better believe, he and Miss Lacey they jest hove to, and gave me the best time I ever" —

"Sylvy!" Mrs. Lem's voice sounded from within. "You can come now. The water's as hot as Topet and we can begin."

Thinkright had taken an early start that morning with the team. Sylvia would have liked to go with him, but he explained that he had to bring back a cumbersome load and needed all the room in the wagon.

Her talks with him were ushering her farther and farther each day into a new world. Even his silences were so full of peace and strength that she loved to be with him. She found herself gaining a consciousness of that peace, — a faith in the care of a Father for His children which was the motive power of Thinkright's life. That she had found her cousin, and been guided to him, was to her an undoubted proof and corroboration of much that Thinkright told her. She looked back upon the idle, discontented girl of the boarding-house in Springfield with wonder and perplexity that such a state of mind could have existed for her. She had impulsive longings to have her father back that she might help him as she had never known how to do; and then came the thought, so quietly but persistently instilled by Thinkright, that the beam in her own eye need be her only care, for by the riddance of all wrong consciousness in herself good would radiate to her environment, and that her father was being taken care of.

From the first moment of yielding her heart and thought to Thinkright's influence the eagerness of her nature made her long to show him quickly — at once — that she would not be vain, would not be selfish, would be humble, would arrive at that state which would cause her cousin to say of her as he had of Edna Derwent, "She does some very good thinking."

The impulse led her to offer help to Mrs. Lem, which, being accepted, Sylvia found herself making beds, wiping dishes, and weeding a flower garden; and her industry so astonished herself that she wondered that those about her could take it so calmly. Her previous

life had consisted of more or less definite yearnings for good times. These "good times" had consisted in an occasional dance or visit to the theatre, and had been the oases in a dull life of idleness varied only by occasional hours when she would pick up her father's materials, and, without permission, would work on one of his unfinished pictures, or else make lively sketches of his friends, to his unfailing amusement.

"I wish you 'd be serious over it, Sylvia," he used to say at such times. "There is n't a bit of doubt that some day I should be able to point to you with pride."

Upon which his daughter would be likely to respond that neither of them belonged to the laboring class, and he could not contradict her.

While she was still very young he had perceived her talent, and from time to time in his desultory fashion had instructed her. There were those among his friends who endeavored to rouse his ambition for the girl, but he had not the force to combat her hereditary objection to work, and he always shrugged away their pleas.

"Sylvia 's bound for a matrimonial port, anyway," he used to say. "With her face she 'll make that harbor fast enough. It would only be throwing money away to start her on a career."

He had made similar speeches often in her hearing, and she recalled them now as with clearer vision she looked out upon life and peered wistfully into the possible vistas of her future.

When her father had seen his end approaching with swiftness, and the realization came that his pretty child was unprepared to meet the world, he had said a good word for his actor friend, as the most practical and sub-

stantial admirer on Sylvia's list; and this she remembered, too, with a great wave of gratitude for deliverance.

The Mill Farm abounded in spots which tempted one to live out of doors. There was the tall pine with its mystical whispered songs. Thinkright had swung a hammock from one of its branches since Judge Trent's visit. From beneath its shade was no view of the sea, but one could lie there and listen to the rhythmic murmur of the waves answering the strains of an Æolian harp which Thinkright's clever hands had fashioned and placed in the shadow of the upper branches. There Sylvia took the books which her cousin gave her to study, and read and study she did, despite the temptation to day-dreaming. Little by little, by gentle implications, Thinkright had conveyed to her that there was to be no thought of her leaving him; and her love moved her strongly to do his bidding and win his approval.

"He does n't do it for my sake. He does it for God and mother," she reflected, as often as some new proof of his thought for her appeared. Little hints of the old yearnings to be admired, to be paramount, flashed up through her new-found humility at times, but they grew fainter with each discovery of her own ignorance, and her mental world enlarged; and in this inner realm she always found two ideals reigning, a prince and a princess, — John Dunham and Edna Derwent. They were beings who breathed a rarer air than she had ever known. All that was fine in her leaped to a comprehension that the more she developed, the more she should value that in their experience which at present was a

sealed book to her. She always classed them together resolutely in her thought. It was a species of self-defense which she had begun to employ from the moment of mental panic which ensued upon Miss Derwent's mention of Dunham's name.

Sylvia had read countless novels, for her father had been insatiate of them; but she had been so confident of her own charm, and so busily engaged in picturing the manner in which she should discourage or make happy her suitors, that the possibilities of her own active heart-interest had not absorbed much of her thought. The coming of John Dunham into her life had changed all that. In a moment of high and sensitive excitement he had dawned upon her vision as a novel type of manhood, and one representing all that was desirable. In vain she knew the superficiality of this judgment. In vain she reasoned her ignorance of him and his character. He had captivated her imagination, and this was the reason that Edna Derwent, as soon as she mentioned him, loomed to Sylvia's stirred thought in the light of a dangerous foe. Edna's very invincibility, however, aided Sylvia's final capitulation to Thinkright. There was neither reason nor comfort for her in desiring to rival the finished and all-conquering Miss Derwent. Thinkright held out the hope that she could alter her own thought; change that sore and miserable consciousness to one where reigned the beauty of peace. Never since that night of bitterness had she strayed from the path which her new light revealed. Judge Trent's visit removed the last doubt as to her remaining with Thinkright, and she knew that if the Mill Farm were to be her home neither Miss Derwent nor Mr. Dunham would

remain a stranger to her. Then it became doubly necessary for her to think right concerning them. They had not met for years until this summer; and now there could surely be but one result from their meeting again. So they stood, equal and preëminent, prince and princess of Sylvia's mental realm, and there she meant to let them reign; meant to rejoice in their happiness, and never to permit herself to dream one dream of this ideal man which could not pass under the espionage of Edna's bright eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROSY CLOUD

ANOTHER spot which was a favorite with Sylvia was out beyond the sheltered shores of the basin and the Tide Mill, on the point of land where the open waters of Casco Bay stretched toward the neighboring islands. Here the fir trees were small and huddled together in groups to withstand the buffeting of winter winds; and here Sylvia sat within a rocky nest she knew, during many a happy solitary hour, watching the sword-fishers go out or return, and the smaller mackerel boats flit lightly on their way.

On days when the great waters were gray and racked from storm, she saw, in their turbulence and moaning, pictures of what her life might have been, and then likened it to the quiet embowered waters of the basin, where Thinkright's love held her safe. To feel gratitude was a novel sensation to Sylvia, born with her new life. She could not remember ever having been grateful for anything until she met her cousin.

The afternoon of this day when he had gone alone to town in the farm-wagon she took her books and sought this rocky nest. There was a steady sailing wind, and she wished for Thinkright, who often took her out with him. Placing behind her back the calico-covered cushion she had brought, she sank into her niche and opened her

book, but immediately her eye was allured and caught by the view, and again there swept over her a longing, that for weeks had been increasing, to capture this loveliness and make it her own. The general awakening of her thought had long since banished the indifference with which during the first days at the Mill Farm she had viewed its surroundings. In place of apathy now there dwelt a craving to exercise the power which she felt was hers; to paint some of these ever changing, alluring phases of sea and sky whose beauty possessed her very soul.

She longed unspeakably for materials for the work, and mourned that she had not gathered whatever among her father's shabby, neglected belongings might be useful, and brought them with her. She recalled carefully all that had ever been said seriously of her talent. A burning regret for neglected opportunities and a burning desire to make up for lost time now possessed her. She fluttered the leaves of the book in her lap. Out dropped pencil sketches of the Tide Mill and a gallery of the residents at the farm.

There was Cap'n Lem's straw hat shading the nose and chin which drew closer together as the kindly, toothless smile widened. There was Mrs. Lem's majestic pompadour and psyche knot, and the company expression which always dilated her nostrils. There was Minty, her round eyes staring, and her lips pursed; and there was — No, Sylvia shook her head. There was not Thinkright. As she looked fondly and wistfully at the retreating hair and short beard, the horizontal lines in the brow and the deep-set eyes, she knew that what made her cousin's face precious was not to be conveyed

by pencil or brush. Swiftly she turned the paper over, and taking her pencil, with a few sure, swift strokes sketched the back of a pair of slightly bent shoulders and a head revealing one ear and the line of the cheek.

"There," she sighed, smiling; "that 's better. I know what I should see if he turned around." Then she sank back again, narrowed her eyes, and looked off at the sky-line, — the distant dark clump of trees on Hawk Island; the nearer shore of Walrus Island; the ineffable sky. Oh, oh, for paints, for brushes, for paper, — in other words, for money! Health and strength were returning to her in full measure. What work was awaiting her? There was no room in Thinkright's universe for drones. He never referred to her becoming self-supporting, but it was a part of her new realization to see that a parasite could never be a healthy growth. She was not sure enough how much substantial worth was indicated by her talent to ask money from Thinkright for its development, and certainly there was no one else to whom she would turn. She reminded herself that right here came an opportunity to apply the trust and confidence that her guardian was teaching her. It was wrong to shiver under one shadow of doubt. The sun would not go out of its course to shine upon her, but she was beginning to know that an unfaithful consciousness was all that could prevent her coming into that place where it would shine upon her.

"If it is right, the way will open. If it is n't right, then you don't want it," was one of Thinkright's declarations; and for the rest she had only to keep her mental home clean and fragrant, wholesome and loving.

Sylvia's eyes rested on the graceful rolling billows advancing in stately procession from the black clump of trees on Hawk Island.

The Father's Love had brought Edna Derwent a summer of play because she needed it. The same love would bring Sylvia Lacey a season of work if that were best. If it were not right to ask Thinkright for the help for which she longed, then some other way would be provided. Supposing she could succeed in some artistic line! Supposing instead of being a dead weight upon her cousin, or at best an assistant to the housekeeper who had been all-sufficient without her, she were able to help him; really to help Thinkright as he grew older! The thought made her cheeks flush, and her eyes grew soft. She bit her lip and closed her eyes.

"Not to send one doubting thought into the world," she reminded herself. Then her thought arose. "Dear Father, Thou knowest my longing. Help me to know the nothingness of every barricade to thy light that I may receive what I need."

After a minute she looked up to see the waters foaming gently away from her nest. They never reached it except in a storm. At the same moment her eye caught a sailboat entering the broad path of water that led to the Tide Mill. She leaned forward to see the better, and recognized Benny Merritt. She noticed that he had a passenger, but the sail hid all but the woman's skirt from the watcher.

"Miss Derwent is coming to see us," thought Sylvia in a flash, and started to her feet. The tide was high enough for the boatman to go into the basin and land at the nearest point to the farm.

Not so. Benny steered his craft for the same rock-sheltered point where he had landed Miss Derwent the last time.

Sylvia ran along the shore toward them. "You can still get inside the basin," she called impulsively, not realizing that the possibilities of the locality were an old story to Benny. The latter looked up inquiringly toward the voice, but it was the passenger who replied, "No doubt we could, but we have to get out of the basin again, that's the trouble." With these words the speaker, a little woman in a shade hat, sprang up and scrambled ashore.

Sylvia paused. Why should she have supposed that the blue-eyed Benny never carried any passenger except Miss Derwent? This one wore a dress of dark blue denim, and her hat was tied securely under the chin by a ribbon which passed over its crown.

The stranger looked up from under its shade and peered at Sylvia through her eye-glasses, at first indifferently, and then with a start.

"Can this be Sylvia Lacey!" she exclaimed, hastening toward the bareheaded girl. Sylvia had caught up her books and pillow and now stood with her arms full, her color coming and going as she braced herself. All the scene in the hotel returned. The hurt and soreness clamored to be felt again. It was a moment of acute struggle. Before her eyes the Tide Mill rose, its closed shutters resolutely hugging past injuries and excluding the besieging sunlight that searched every crevice to pour in warmth and light.

Miss Martha read something of her niece's thoughts. She had undertaken this visit with dread, and the

sudden encounter made her rather tremulous; but, above all things, Benny Merritt must suspect nothing.

"It 's the very first day I could come over, my dear," she said hurriedly, "what with home cares and a rough sea; I 'm not the best of sailors, but I 've thought of you often. Now Benny," turning to him, "I 'll be back at this very spot in one hour. I shan't fail, understand, so don't sail off anywhere, or else we shan't reach home in time for tea. Let us get over these rocks into the woods, Sylvia, and then I can take some of your traps. How well you are looking, my dear child."

The very voice was painful to her niece in its associations, but the girl followed as Miss Lacey briskly moved off into the woods before a word could be said to lead Benny into speculation.

Sylvia, while she followed, asked herself if her prayer had been aught beside empty words. Was she really desirous of proving the nothingness of all things that excluded the light? She seemed to see Thinkright looking straight into her eyes. What guests were trying to elbow their way into her mental home? As soon as they had reached the path her aunt turned. Sylvia spoke, and her tone was gentle.

"You need n't carry anything, Aunt Martha. I 'm used to running about here loaded."

Miss Lacey glanced up at her quickly. That dark look which had at first met her recognition had now melted into light. There was no mistaking the girl's expression as they stood facing each other behind the shelter of a clump of firs.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" exclaimed Miss Martha

brokenly, grasping her niece's arms and gazing into her eyes, "I am very glad to see you."

"You were kind to come," returned Sylvia, and she kissed Miss Martha's cheek under the scooping hat. Then they walked on.

"What these few weeks have done for you, Sylvia! Perfect rest, good food, the best air in the world, regular hours and no care, ought to work a miracle when one is nineteen, and they have in you. If it had n't been for those short curls of yours I should n't have recognized you at first."

They moved slowly along the path, and Sylvia asked for Miss Derwent.

"She 's as happy as the days are long," declared Miss Lacey. "She told me to bring you back if I could."

"How kind. Thinkright will sail me over some day to call. He went to town this morning. I hope he 'll not miss your visit altogether."

As soon as they had reached the clearing from which the farmhouse was visible Sylvia gave an exclamation of satisfaction. "There they are; there are the horses! He has come."

They could see the team taken out from the wagon, standing near the barn, their harness dangling while Thinkright and Cap'n Lem were stooping over some object which the wagon hid from the view of those below.

"Would n't you like to go and speak to him?" asked Sylvia.

Miss Martha looked at her curiously. The eager tone and the face all alight were eloquent. Well, Thinkright doubtless deserved it.

"Yes, let's go and see what they are working over."

Sylvia dropped her cushion, and the books on top of it, and the two hurried toward the barn.

Before the engrossed men perceived their approach Sylvia saw that it was a slender, graceful boat which was absorbing their attention. It was varnished within and without, the golden brown wood glinting in the sun. Two pairs of oars lay on the grass.

"Oh, Thinkright, what a beauty!" exclaimed Sylvia. The men looked up, smiling. "Here is Aunt Martha," added the girl.

"Just in the nick of time, Martha," said Thinkright, coming forward and shaking hands. "We've a beauty here to show you."

Miss Martha came forward to greet Cap'n Lem.

"Glad to see you back, Miss Marthy. What d'ye think o' this plaything, hey?"

"Why, I think it *is* a plaything!" returned Miss Lacey briskly. "What are you going to do with it, Cap'n Lem? Use it for an ornament on the lawn and plant flowers in it?"

"Wall, I guess I can't afford no sech a vase as that,— not till my ship comes in."

"But it's a mere toy for the ocean, as you say," rejoined Miss Martha. "Who would go out in that shell?"

"This child here," said Thinkright, while Sylvia's eyes grew more eager. "It's just the thing for the basin."

"Thinkright, you have n't bought me a boat!" the girl cried.

He shook his head and smiled. "No, not I. Your Uncle Calvin has sent you this."

"And if it hain't got the durndest name for a yaller bo't that ever I see," remarked Cap'n Lem.

"Yes," added Thinkright. "We're surprised at the name, for it is Judge Trent's own selection. It scarcely seems characteristic."

Sylvia and her aunt hurried around the other side of the little craft. In neat, small black letters was printed, The Rosy Cloud.

Sylvia gazed, then she colored to the roots of the silky curls and laughed. The others watched her curiously.

"Do you know what he was aiming at?" asked Thinkright.

"Yes," she nodded. "He was aiming high."

Miss Lacey kept her sharp eyes on the conscious young face, devoured with curiosity.

"Tell us the joke, Sylvia," she begged.

"It is n't a joke, it 's earnest," returned the girl, and a warm feeling arose in her heart for the eagle-eyed man in the high hat. "Did you ever hear of anything so surprising, Thinkright, and so kind?"

"He told me he was going to order it when he went away," responded her cousin; then he turned toward Miss Lacey. "Calvin found this child of ours trying to learn to row in an old general utility tub I have down at the basin, and he thought she deserved better things."

The speaker looked at Sylvia, who came close to him and took hold of his hand, while she continued to look at her new possession.

It was Love expressed to her again; and the guest she had tried with gentleness to win, sweet Humility, sank deeper into her heart, and sent up a note of gratitude that she had not a few minutes ago tried to punish

Aunt Martha by word or look and so embittered this moment.

"It's amazing, simply amazing in Calvin!" thought Miss Martha. "She must have bewitched him, and what could he have meant by 'The Rosy Cloud,' and why should she blush over it?"

Thinkright walked to the house with the visitor a few minutes later, while Cap'n Lem stayed to put up the horses and Sylvia lingered to examine her light oars.

"Calvin's outdone himself," remarked Miss Martha. "He must have taken a great fancy to her."

"It looks that way," responded Thinkright.

"And you don't know what he could possibly mean by that poetical name, do you?"

"I have n't an idea," returned her companion, well pleased that such was the case, for he could see that otherwise it might go hard with him.

"And I daresay you 're quite as bewitched with her as Calvin," pursued Miss Lacey curiously.

"I 'm under her little thumb, but luckily she does n't know it," was the reply.

"Well, I think it's high time I came over to get acquainted with her myself," remarked Miss Martha.

"High time, Martha," returned Thinkright, smiling. "It's high time you got in the game."

CHAPTER XVIII

HAWK ISLAND

An hour later Miss Martha had the escort of her niece down to the shore again. She peered about alertly for a sign of her boatman.

"Now I told Benny that I should n't fail" — she began with annoyance. "Oh, there he is," for the top of the mast was visible beyond a farther jutting point of rock. "Benny!" she called. His hand appeared and waved a signal. "I suppose we shall have to go over there. I should like to know why he could n't stay where I told him to. Benny," as they drew near enough to be heard, "you gave me a start for a minute. Why did n't you wait for me in that same place?"

Benny glanced toward Sylvia. "Thought yew might n't care to squat on that rock all night," he drawled imperturbably.

"What do you mean? Oh — was n't the tide right?"

"No; most likely it did n't hear what you said. Anyways, it did n't wait. It kep' on a-goin' down jest the same."

Miss Martha's lips drew in. "You absurd boy. Benny, this is my niece, another Miss Lacey; and Sylvia, this is Benny Merritt. We could n't get along without him at the island; and now we must fly. How's the wind, Benny?"

"Pretty good chance; we 'll have to beat some."

"Well, you must n't let the boat tip," responded Miss Martha, as she crept gingerly along the slippery rocks, and helped by Sylvia jumped in and took her seat. "Don't fall so in love with The Rosy Cloud that you can't come to see us, Sylvia, and do be careful with your new toy. It does n't look much more substantial than a cloud to me. Benny, look *out !*" For the wind had seized the sail and flapped it noisily before it set firmly. The last words Sylvia caught were, "You are letting it tip now. You know I don't like it, Benny."

Sylvia laughed as she sprang up the bank. Even in this brief visit she had observed how habitually the uppermost thought in her aunt's mind effervesced into speech, and she saw how natural had been Miss Martha's lack of repression at Hotel Frisbie. She felt for Benny Merritt with his nervous passenger, but her sympathy was wasted. When Miss Lacey sailed alone with Benny she always kept up an intermittent stream of directions and suggestions to which the boy paid not the slightest attention.

"Doin' my best, Miss Marthy," he used to reply sometimes. "If ye say so I 'll stop and let ye get out and walk."

Each time the boat had to come about for a new tack, necessitating the sail's passing over Miss Martha's head, the air was vibrant with her small shrieks and louder suggestions; but to-day, every time they settled down for the smooth run, a pensiveness fell upon her.

"The Mill Farm is looking real prosperous, Benny," she remarked during one of these calms.

"I s'pose so," returned the boy. "More folks comin'

to the islands every summer. More folks to want their truck."

"Seems to me," observed Miss Martha, "I used to hear that things were n't very pleasant between the mainland folks and the islanders."

"Used to be so. Hated each other, I've heard my father say, but sence I've been a-growin' up things have changed. We've ben findin' out that they was n't all potato vines, and they've ben findin' out that we ain't all fish scales. My father says Thinkright Johnson's at the bottom o' the change."

"Thinkright's a good man," returned Miss Martha, and with that she fell into pensive mood again until time for another acute moment of dodging the sail and coming about.

To think that in those few hours Judge Trent should have come to take such an interest in Sylvia. So her thoughts ran. Was it the girl's good looks, or was it simply that twinges of the judge's conscience had induced the wish to make the *amende honorable*, and that the gift of the expensive boat was an effort to reinstate the giver in his own eyes?

Something of an intimate nature must have passed between them. To what could "the rosy cloud" have reference which should bring such conscious color to Sylvia's softly rounded cheek?

Miss Lacey shook her head. "If I only had Thinkright's chance," she thought, "I'd find out; but men are so queer. Probably he won't make the least effort. Provoking!"

She was correct in her suspicion. Thinkright did not ask any questions. He suspected that the judge's

interview with his niece might have brought to light some of her new ideas, and he knew the judge's opinion of all that class of thought which he termed transcendental; but however ironical might be the reference in the boat's name, he would not have gone to the trouble of having it lettered thereon without a kindly intent.

Thinkright was satisfied, and contented himself with building a small boathouse on the waterside for Sylvia's new possession. She was his constant companion during the work, and sat beside him on the grass while he sawed and hammered, waiting upon him whenever opportunity offered.

He missed an eagerness of enthusiasm which he would have expected in the girl regarding the handsome boat. He could not know how fervently she wished that Uncle Calvin had given her instead the money it had cost. She could not express this thought to her cousin for obvious reasons; but as she sat beside him on an old log she built air castles that grew faster than the little boathouse.

"There is n't anything too good to be true, is there, Thinkright?" she said to him during a pause one day.

He came over and took a seat beside her, wiping his lined brow with his handkerchief.

She looked at him wistfully. "I 'm expecting something very good to happen to me," she added.

"That 's right; and something has. How about The Rosy Cloud?"

She sighed, and leaned her head against her companion's blue cotton shoulder.

"It 's beautiful. I shall have all sorts of fine times

with it. Think of throwing a lot of cushions inside, and taking a good story, then rowing out into the middle of the basin to float and read. All the trees would be leaning forward and beckoning, and I should n't know which The Rosy Cloud would favor."

Thinkright clasped his knee. "The Tide Mill would do its share of beckoning, remember. Look out for the current."

"The poor old thing!" remarked Sylvia. "Sometimes the mill looks so dignified and pathetic that I sympathize with it, and then again it seems just sulky and obstinate."

"We 're very apt to read our feelings into the landscape," returned the other.

"Yes," went on the girl, her eyes as she leaned on her cousin's shoulder resting on the deserted, weather-beaten building in the distance, "when I first came, my heart just yearned toward that old mill. It looked just as I felt. It had made up its mind never to forgive. I had made up my mind never to forgive. Love has opened my locked shutters, and do you know, Thinkright, some afternoons those closed mill blinds seem to be melting in the sun. They grow so soft and rosy, I watch them fascinated. It seems as if they were giving way and I find myself expecting to see them slowly turn back. Oh," impulsively, "I want them to turn back! Could n't we get a ladder and row out there some day and climb up and open them?"

Thinkright smiled. "They 're nailed tight, dear, and they don't belong to us."

Sylvia shook her head. "Well," she persisted whimsically, "I believe they will open some time. I shan't be

content until they do; and somehow or other I shall be mixed up with it."

"Is that the good thing you are expecting?" asked Thinkright, smiling, "to become a house-breaker?"

"No. Love will open the shutters yet. You don't understand me."

"Nothing that Love should accomplish would surprise me in the least," was the response. "Well, what is your hope then, — the thing you referred to a few minutes ago?"

Sylvia's eyes looked across the water. "I'd better not tell you yet," she replied. "It is n't your problem. It's mine."

"Very well," agreed Thinkright. "Just keep remembering 'Thy will be done,' — His great Will for good. His great Will that all shall be on earth as it is in heaven; that all shall be good and harmonious; and then your own little will and its puny strength won't get in the way, and you will find yourself helping to carry out your Father's designs."

Sylvia took a deep breath. "That is what I want to do. Once I should have been so happy, so contented to float in my boat with cushions and a good story!"

"Well," Thinkright smiled, "I hope you 're not going to lose that ability. It has its place."

Sylvia turned her curly head until she met his shining eyes. "I'm too strong now to play all the time," she said.

Her companion patted her arm. "Mrs. Lem says you are a regular busy bee."

"Yes, but she did perfectly well without me."

Her companion met her gaze for a silent moment and speculated as to what its gravity might mean.

"Are you thinking again of the stage, Sylvia?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed vehemently, for instantly a vision of Nat rose before her. "I" — she hesitated, looked out again to the water and back at her cousin. She was sorely tempted to tell him, but the old motive restrained her in time. That was not the way for the solution to come, merely by making herself a heavier tax upon Thinkright's simple fortunes.

"Then you have some definite idea of what you would like to do?" he asked.

His manner was quiet, but there was a note of mental exultation within him at the healthful symptom.

"Yes, but it is n't time yet to tell you of it."

He put his arm around her. "Very well. What more can we wish to be sure of than Omnipotence and Omnipresence. You know that it is only good that is constructive. Evil is destructive, and in the end even destroys itself. So long as you want only good you are safe in the everlasting arms and are blessed." The speaker changed his position and his tone.

"This is rest enough now for me, little girl. I must be up and doing, for we want to get that boat of yours out of dry dock."

It was about a week later that Sylvia made her first visit to Hawk Island. Thinkright sailed her over. It was the longest trip she had made by water, and the changing aspect of mainland and islands from each new viewpoint delighted her.

The landmark which most interested her was the dark clump of trees by which she had always distinguished Hawk Island. It began to spread and alter in form as they approached, until it became a low forest, cresting

the hill which gradually rose some seventy feet above the water. At last they entered a still cove which made a natural harbor in the island's side, and there Thinkright moored his boat. As soon as they stepped out upon the shore Sylvia saw a girl hurrying toward them down the sloping grass, and waving her hand. She wore a short dark skirt and a white waist and no hat.

"We've been watching you with the glass," she said, greeting them. "Your note came last night. I'm so glad you had such a perfect morning."

Her cheeks were brown and her eyes danced with good cheer. "Why, Miss Sylvia, your aunt told me; yet I was not prepared to see such a change. There's nothing like Casco Bay, is there?"

Sylvia's gaze clung to the vivacious face, and she had a realization of the small part which time plays in our mental processes. It seemed to her that transforming years had passed since that evening when she shivered outside the door of the Mill Farm, and heard this same laughing voice within.

"Miss Lacey is watching for us." Edna took Thinkright's arm, and they began to walk up the path through a green meadow. Snowdrifts of daisies whitened the field. "The dear things are lasting so much longer than usual this year," said Edna, as Sylvia exclaimed over their charm. "We have the last of things out in this exposed spot, you see, and I think it's quite as pleasant as having the first of them the way you do in your sheltered nook."

The breeze freshened as they ascended, and at last they stood on the crest of the green ridge.

To the south of the island the pointed firs made a

dark, irregular sky-line against the azure. Here there were no trees, nothing to obstruct the illimitable stretches of water and picturesque shore. It was a nearer and more overwhelming view of what had taken Sylvia's breath when she discovered the mighty sea on that first day, driving to the Mill Farm.

How far away seemed that day and the sore heart whose resentment embittered all the beauty; when her hand was against every man because she believed every man's hand to be against her.

As the three stood there, watching, in silence, Edna saw the blue eyes fill, and her heart warmed toward her guest, although she could not guess at the flood of feeling that forced those bright drops from their fountain.

CHAPTER XIX

A NOR'EASTER

ANEMONE COTTAGE was built partly of boulders taken from the shore. Its roomy porch was supported by pillars of the same stone. The bluish tint of balsam firs stood out against the darker foliage of the evergreens that surrounded it, and such trees as cut off the superb view from the piazza had been removed, leaving vistas which were an exaltation to the beholder.

The beauty of the place sank into Sylvia's heart, and as Miss Martha appeared on the porch to meet the guests, the light of hospitality shone in her face, and the girl forgot that it had ever been difficult to greet her aunt warmly.

"Your sail has given you sharp appetites, I'm sure," said Miss Martha, "and dinner is just going to be put on the table."

They all moved into the living-room. It ran the full width of the cottage and had a wide, deep fireplace opposite the door. A round centre-table covered with books and periodicals, an upright piano, and numerous armchairs as comfortable as they were light, furnished the room.

"How charming!" exclaimed Sylvia, looking from the rugs on the floor to the cushions in the window-seats.

"Yes, it is," said Edna. "It's a fine port in a storm, but in all decent weather we scorn it."

Sylvia went to a window. A rocky path led between the symmetrical firs down toward the shore where far below boomed the noisy surf.

"And how is the boat, Sylvia?" asked Miss Martha.

"It's a joy," replied the girl, looking around brightly.

"Oh, yes, your boat," said Edna. "I'm going to invite myself over on purpose to row with you. Miss Lacey has told me all about it and its mysterious name."

Her eyes twinkled at Sylvia.

"It is — very mysterious," returned the latter, laughing.

Miss Lacey gave a quick nod. "I'm going to ask Judge Trent what it means when he comes," she declared.

"Fie, Miss Martha! How indiscreet!" laughed Edna. "Can't he have a little undisturbed flirtation with his best girl?"

She was surprised at the suddenness and depth of Miss Lacey's blush, but the little woman bustled out to the dining-room and shortly announced dinner.

It seemed to Sylvia that she had never been so hungry and that food had never tasted so delicious. She remarked upon it somewhat apologetically, and Edna laughed at her. "My dear girl, it's the way of the place," she said. "Of course we eat nothing prosaic here. These potatoes grew at the Mill Farm, these lobsters were swimming this morning. This lamb, I'm afraid, was skipping around only a few days ago on

Beacon Island. This salad grew just over the fence from that daisy field we passed through this morning, — and so on."

For dessert they had a deep huckleberry pie.

"How's this, Sylvia, eh?" asked Thinkright, after the first juicy mouthful. "I thought Mrs. Lem was pretty good at it."

"It is perfect," returned Sylvia, "but how we shall look!" she added.

"Don't worry," said Edna. "I always keep a box of tooth-brushes upstairs for wanderers trapped just as you are. Of course it is a good pie. These berries were growing on the shore of Merriconeag Sound yesterday, and Miss Lacey and I picked them ourselves. Were n't we a happy, disreputable pair, Miss Martha? Our dresses were stained, our fingers were a sight, and our lips, — I 'll draw a veil! We both would have done so then if we 'd had any."

Sylvia listened, smiling. In her preoccupation she let her fork veer away from her plate.

"Oh!" she ejaculated regretfully. "See what I've done!" A drop of the rich dark juice had fallen on the spotless cloth and seemed to spread mischievously. "Dear, I meant to be so careful."

"Not a bit of harm," returned Edna. "That is a feature of the huckleberry season. The stain vanishes under hot water."

Sylvia's eyes clung to the spot. A thought had suddenly come to her like a lightning flash. She knew vaguely that her hostess was saying pleasant things, but she could not follow them.

"Eat your pie, Sylvia," said her aunt. "We always

have a second piece. Jenny's feelings would be hurt if we did n't."

The girl commenced eating again, mechanically. "You picked these yourselves?" she said. "They grow for anybody to pick?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Edna. "I enjoy it. I think Miss Lacey considers a berrying expedition a good deal of a pleasure exertion."

"They always ripen first in such shut-in fields," objected Miss Lacey.

Edna laughed. "The kind Mrs. Lem would call hot as Topet."

"Oh, I'd love to pick them," said Sylvia. "Do they grow around the Mill Farm, Thinkright?"

Her eyes were shining as she asked her question.

"No. Nowhere around us, — that is, nowhere near. I've often wondered at it."

"Stay here, and go with me, Sylvia," said Edna cordially. "We'll let Miss Martha off, and you and I will take Benny and make a day of it."

"Oh, I'd love to!" exclaimed Sylvia. "I'll try to come over soon."

"Not at all. Always make the most of a bird in the hand. You're here now. I'm going to keep her, — oh, as long as I can, Thinkright."

He smiled at Sylvia, who smiled back, still with the excited shining in her eyes. "She seems willing, I must say," he remarked, pleased at the prospect of the two girls thus becoming acquainted.

The hour before he had to start back was spent by them all together, at first on the rocky ledges below the house where the caldrons of foam and fountains of

spray made the finest show, and then roaming through the fragrant woods. At each new vista Miss Martha noted the narrowing of her niece's eyes and the absorption of her gaze.

"I guess you have some of your poor father's artistic taste," she said to her at one pause.

"I wish my father could have seen this place," was Sylvia's reply.

When the time came for Thinkright to make his adieux she clung to him.

"I declare I believe she 's homesick at the parting," said Miss Lacey to Edna. They two were standing on the piazza and the others a little way off on the grass; but Sylvia was not homesick, she was whispering to her cousin: "I'm staying for a reason, Thinkright!" she said. "I've had an idea. I believe it 's a good one."

He patted her shoulder. "That 's right, that 's right." He gestured toward the rolling expanse about them. "For every drop of water in that ocean there are thousands of possibilities of good for every one of God's children. The shutters are open, little one. Why should n't the blessing flow in?"

And so began for Sylvia the visit which always afterward stood out in her memory unique in the poignancy of its novel impressions. Despite the simplicity of life at Anemone Cottage, there was an order and smoothness in the management of details which constantly attracted and charmed the guest. The poetry of the wild enchanting surroundings was ever sounding a new note in sky or sea or flower, and the companionship of Edna Derwent was an experience which Sylvia seized upon with an eagerness wholly devoid of worldly considerations.

It was on a Friday that Thinkright had left her at the island. During that night a northeast wind sprang up, and on Saturday a storm prevented the expedition after berries. It was a wonderful day to Sylvia.

Torrents of rain beat upon the windows, the atmosphere was a blur through which the surf thundered mysteriously.

Logs blazed merrily in the great fireplace. Sylvia found a feast of many courses in the illustrations of the magazines. Edna was interested to see her discrimination.

"Oh, I remember," she said. "Miss Lacey told me your father was an artist."

Miss Martha was sitting by the fire darning stockings, and at this she gave an involuntary alert glance at her niece where she sat with Edna by the round table, her head bent above one of the periodicals.

"My father never learned to apply himself. He was not deeply interested in his work," replied Sylvia. The blue eyes looked up into Edna's dark ones. "No one ever taught my father how to think right," she added.

"I see," returned Miss Derwent; "but your interest must have been a great help to him."

"No, I was never any help to him. As I look back I seem to myself to have been only a chrysalis. I had eyes and saw not, and ears and heard not. I only began to live when I came to the Mill Farm. Poor father!"

Edna's eyes were soft. "I understand," she said.

Miss Lacey did not understand, but she suspected. She saw the look that passed between the two girls, and remembered Thinkright's peculiar views and Edna's adherence to them.

"'T is n't doing Sylvia any harm, anyway," she reflected, "and I know she 'll never have a disloyal thought of her father," and she pulled another stocking over her hand.

"Well, you are interested now, certainly," remarked Edna, increasingly surprised at the girl's perception of the quality of the work of the various artists, combined with such comparative ignorance of their names and reputations.

"I have never had much opportunity," said Sylvia simply, "and, as you can see, I never made the most of what I did have. I suppose father had ambition once "—

"Indeed he did, my dear!" put in Miss Lacey emphatically.

Sylvia started. In her absorption she had forgotten her aunt's presence.

"Yes, I suppose so," she replied; "but things went hard with him, and for years past the only work he could depend upon were the pictures he made for advertisements and an occasional cartoon for a paper."

"Indeed," returned Miss Lacey, leaning forward and poking the fire in her embarrassment. This was entirely gratuitous frankness on Sylvia's part. "Well, I can assure you he was made for better things," she went on, bridling. "When you visit me I will show you a landscape in my parlor worth a thousand of the daubs people rave over. Half the time you can't tell whether they 're trying to paint a tulip field or a prairie fire. Ridiculous! You can almost count the rings on the horns of the cows in this landscape. It 's what I call a *picture*."

It was well that Miss Lacey enjoyed this work of art,

for it was all she had to show for many a squeeze given to her slender purse by the artist.

Edna paused in the talk she was led into by her guest's eager attention and questions.

"Listen to the surf!" she exclaimed. "You must see that show, Sylvia. We must go down to the rocks."

"Fine! But I have n't any other clothes if I wet these," returned the girl, looking down.

"Oh, it 's bathing suits to-day, and rubbers, and mackintoshes."

Soon they were equipped; and leaving the cottage by the back door they worked their way around the corner of the house to the sea front, and by the help of the sturdy trees that were making their usual good fight with the elements managed to creep down to the upper tier of rocks. Here it was impossible to hear one another speak, and the girls' exhilaration could be expressed only by glances as they clung to each other and the rocks, where to-day the foam flakes flew about them, although it was usually high and dry for some distance below this. The fine sharp needles of rain, which at first made their eyes smart, ceased for a time, and they watched the giant waves at their hoarse, clamorous revel, joining the roar with their own shrieks of mirth and excitement whenever some reckless fling of spray drenched them from head to foot.

Edna had placed Turkish towels and their clothing in a shed at the back of the house, and when finally the rain began again to cut their eyes and shut away even the nearest view, she succeeded in dragging the reluctant and dripping Sylvia thither, and they again made ready for the house.

"Come in, you two mermaids," exclaimed Miss Lacey when they appeared. She threw more logs on the fire. "I began to think you had gone to see the land 'where corals lie.'"

Edna laughed and took the pins out of her hair, so that it rolled in damp lengths about her. Sylvia's curls were gemmed with bright drops, and both girls were rosy and sparkling from their tussle with the gale.

"Sylvia has the only hair that ever ought to go to the seashore," remarked Edna, looking with open admiration at the piquant face under the jeweled diadem. "You can take a chair, Sylvia, but I shall have to turn my back to that lovely fire."

Sylvia stretched herself luxuriously in a reclining chair before the blaze while her hostess sank on the rug and spread her dark locks to the heat.

"You do look like a mermaid," said Sylvia.

"Mermaids sing," remarked Edna. "Would you like to hear me sing?"

"I don't know," replied the other slowly, "whether I could stand one more thing. I think I might pass away if you should sing, the way you look now."

Edna laughed. "I feel like singing," she said, and jumping up, went to the piano and pulled over the music.

"I think Miss Lacey started me by speaking about 'Where Corals Lie.' I'll sing the Elgar 'Sea Pictures.'"

Edna had an even, contralto voice, and sang with the charm of temperament; but to the sensitive listener the enchantment of the sea seemed to linger in the tones of this creature who, with the sparkling drops still shining

in her dark hair, poured out such strange and moving music. It stirred Sylvia to the depths.

At the close of the song "Where Corals Lie," she sighed some comment, and Miss Martha spoke:—

"That is n't what you 'd call a *pretty* tune, not near as pretty as a lot that Edna sings," she remarked, "but that song goes right to my backbone somehow and chills right up and down it; and the way she says,—

> 'Leave me, leave me, let me go
> And see the land where corals lie,'

it sort of comes over me when she stays long down on the rocks in a storm, and makes me feel queer."

"That 's right, Miss Lacey," remarked Edna, without turning around. "I 'm a very sentimental and desperate person."

"You are when you sing, my dear," retorted Miss Martha with conviction.

"Now I 'll give you the Capri one," said Edna, "but I never saw a day at Capri that fitted it as every day does here;" and with wind and wave outside making an obligato to her flowing accompaniment, she sang "In Haven."

> "Closely let me hold thy hand,
> Storms are sweeping sea and land,
> Love alone will stand.
>
> "Closely cling, for waves beat fast,
> Foam flakes cloud the hurrying blast,
> Love alone will last.
>
> "Kiss my lips and softly say,
> 'Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;
> Love alone will stay.'"

Sylvia's hands were pressed to her eyes when the song was finished, and her aunt looked at her curiously, for she saw that she could not speak. Had Miss Martha been told that the young man in Judge Trent's office had any part in the tumult of feeling that sent the color to Sylvia's temples and the tears to her eyes she would have scouted the idea as too wild for consideration.

"That *is* a very pretty one," Miss Martha remarked in the silence that followed. She spoke to ease what she felt to be a tense situation. At the same time she winked at Edna, who had turned about to face her auditors. Sylvia's eyes remained hidden so Miss Martha continued: —

"There 's something about those words that makes me think of 'Oh, Promise Me.' That 's my favorite song. Do see if you can't remember it, Edna."

But the latter rose and came back to the fire.

"I must dry my hair," she said. "That 's the drawback of not being a real mermaid."

She sank again on the rug near Sylvia.

The latter uncovered her flushed eyes and reached one hand down to Edna, who took it.

"If you had n't — had n't had anything," said Sylvia unsteadily, "you 'd understand."

"I do," replied Edna; but she was mistaken. Though she pressed the hand very sympathetically she did not understand.

CHAPTER XX

THE POOL

THE next day being Sunday Miss Lacey vetoed the excursion after berries as a snare to Benny Merritt's feet, which should be turned toward the little island church, whether or not they would be.

"Never mind," said Edna philosophically; "the longer we wait the more berries we shall find. We can count on good weather for some time now."

"You would n't want to sail anyway to-day," said Miss Lacey. "It looks blue enough, but there are white caps left over from yesterday that would never get *me* to ride on them, I can tell you."

"The Sound is n't rough," replied Edna; "but we 'll all be good girls and write letters. Come down to the Fir Ledges with us, Miss Lacey. We 'll write there."

"Thank you, I've outgrown that," replied Miss Martha briskly. "Sit with your heels higher than your head, and no decent place to lean, and just at the most important moment have the wind double your paper over or blow it away. No, thank you; but there 's room at the table for all of us if you 'll be sensible."

The table was a round one placed in an angle of the spacious piazza, which had been glassed in as protection from the prevailing wind.

Here Miss Martha was wont to gather her writing materials, and with her back to the view, not for fear of

its temptations, but in order to get a better light, indite many an underlined epistle to her friends at home. She sometimes had Edna's company, but that could not be today. The young hostess was enjoying too much exhibiting the charms of her beloved habitat to the guest who thrilled in such responsive appreciation at the moments and places where others had often proved disappointing.

"No bribe could induce us to be sensible," was Edna's response to Miss Lacey's suggestion. "We are going to the Fir Ledges, and there is no knowing when you will see us again."

"Oh, yes, there is," returned Miss Martha dryly. She was seating herself for her enjoyable morning. She was going to send Selina Lane some of Jenny's receipts. "There will be halibut and egg sauce, lemon meringue pie, and various other things served in this house at 1.30," she went on, "and I have an idea that you 'll take an interest in them."

Edna and Sylvia exchanged a thoughtful look. "Perhaps we may," said Edna.

"I 'm sure of it," added Sylvia with conviction.

Miss Lacey's satisfied laugh followed the pair down the woodland road, and she looked after them.

"Everything has turned out so well," she thought. "I remember how this summer stood up in my mind as one of the obstacles to letting Sylvia come to me, for I did n't see where I could leave her while I came to Hawk Island, — and now, just look. I really do think Edna has taken a fancy to the child, though even *I* can't always judge of Edna's feelings by her actions."

Miss Martha looked fixedly at the side of the house, her pen poised in her hand. She was weighing the ques-

tion as to whether it would be well to mention to Selina Lane her niece's presence at Anemone Cottage. If she spoke of her, it might lead in future to embarrassing questions; if she did not speak of her, Selina was liable to learn of Sylvia from some other source; for no way had yet been discovered of permanently concealing anything from Miss Lane, and that spinster, so fond of jumping at conclusions that she frequently overleaped them, would be sure to decide that Miss Martha was ashamed of her niece.

To tell or not to tell! She was still balancing her pen and the question when a firm tread crunched the gravel behind her, and turning she beheld a man advancing to the steps.

He was dressed in outing flannels, and his cap was presumably in his pocket. At least he had none on his head. Miss Lacey rose with a start and hurried to the steps.

"Why, Mr. Dunham, I was never so surprised in my life!" she exclaimed.

He smiled. "I was told that you would look more kindly upon a surprise party at ten in the morning than at ten at night," he answered.

His eyes were level with Miss Martha's as she stood two steps above him on the piazza, and he pressed her hard, little, unresponsive hand. But if her hand was hard her heart was not, and it was with much appreciation of the visitor's attractive personality that she urged him to take his choice of the piazza chairs.

"This is a great place," he remarked, as she fluttered back to her table, and he dropped on the piazza rail. "I've never been on the islands before, — only sailed past them."

"But how did you get here so early? Were you at the Island House all night?"

"Not at all. When Mr. Johnson returned on Friday he found Judge Trent and myself in possession. This morning I went out with Cap'n Lem to his pound, so was ready for an early start over here; and it surely is a great place."

Dunham looked off upon the rolling billows breaking in snow here and there above unseen ledges.

"Your clothes are wet. You had a rough sail."

"In spots, yes; but it 's rather sheltered between here and the Tide Mill. You 're looking well, Miss Lacey."

"Who would n't in such a place," she rejoined; "and just think, Mr. Dunham, my niece is here."

"So I understand." The young man gave a tentative glance around at the house.

"Oh, they 're not in. Miss Derwent is never in, unless it storms the way it did yesterday, and then she 's liable to be in oilskins hanging on to some rock and scaring me out of my seven senses. Sylvia 's just like her. They were both out yesterday."

"I 'm glad to learn that your niece is strong enough for that," returned Dunham.

Miss Lacey made a gesture. "She did it, anyway." She lowered her voice to a confidential pitch. "Have n't things worked around wonderfully, Mr. Dunham?" The speaker drew back, giving him a significant look.

"How do you mean?" asked Dunham cautiously.

"Since that day we were at Hotel Frisbie. I have n't dared look to see how many new gray hairs that week gave me, and here we are, all so calm and happy. Miss Derwent being so kind and hospitable to Sylvia, and

none of my doings at all. You see, it would have been such an impossible thing for me to suggest that my niece should visit here, but it came around in the most natural way through Thinkright."

"It is fine," returned Dunham. Sylvia's name still meant for him only the dew-laden eyes that beseeched him as he left her at the Association that day in Boston. He felt some curiosity as to how Miss Lacey had finally made her peace, and he felt sure that she would like to tell him; but the younger Miss Lacey's affairs were none of his.

"I'm sorry not to find Miss Derwent," he said.

"Oh, you'll find her," returned Miss Lacey briskly. "You will stay to dinner with us, of course."

"Certainly not," returned Dunham quickly.

"Why, you will. We have it at noon, you know."

"In these togs?" asked John incredulously — "Miss Derwent?"

"Oh, hers are n't any better," returned Miss Martha. "That's the island fashion."

"No, — I'll go to the — what did you say? There's some sort of a hotel here, is n't there?"

"Yes. Some sort," returned Miss Lacey, "but not your sort. Don't say another word about it, Mr. Dunham. Why, Miss Derwent would be scandalized, — an old friend like you. You said you were, did n't you?" she added, with sudden questioning.

"Yes, so old that I shall be new," returned Dunham, smiling. "I only hope she'll remember me."

"Why did n't Judge Trent come with you? We should have been very pleased to see him at dinner, too," said Miss Lacey, with a little access of formality.

"I did ask him, but he said he was n't tired of terra firma yet."

"Has he come to stay?"

"Yes, for a while. We 've locked up the offices and are going to forget dull care together. He 's devoted to this region, is n't he?"

"Yes, and what is more interesting and wonderful — to Sylvia," returned Miss Martha, again dropping her voice as if there might be eavesdroppers in Arcady. "That is, he must be. He has given her the loveliest boat."

"I saw it the evening we came. Mr. Johnson was showing it to him."

"What did he say about its name?" eagerly.

"Its name?"

"Yes. The Rosy Cloud."

"Why, — nothing."

"Did n't Thinkright ask him anything?"

"Not that I remember."

"Has Judge Trent said anything to you about Sylvia?"

"Not a word."

Miss Lacey, who had been leaning forward, flung herself back in her chair.

"If there 's anything exasperating on earth it 's a man!" she exclaimed. "Well" — for John laughed, "excuse me, Mr. Dunham, you can't help it; but men never know when anything is interesting. Now I can tell you just where you 'll find those girls, and I 'm going to let you go. You take that path through the woods, and it 'll bring you into an open field, but you 'll still see a path. Keep right on till if you took another step you 'd

fall about fifty feet and have to swim. There you 'll find a huddle of ledges and ravines and brave little firs that have hooked their roots into the rock somehow, and there you 'll find also a couple of girls who went down to write letters, and I know have n't written a word; and do keep an eye on your watch and get them here by quarter past one. Things are so much nicer when they are hot and good, and Edna is no more to be trusted than if she was five. If she happened to get to watching a barnacle eat its dinner she 'd never once think of her own."

Just at present Miss Derwent was certainly not thinking of dinner. The tide was falling, and she and her companion were seated amid the sighing firs and watching its retreat; that is, Sylvia was watching, and Edna was reading aloud to her. At last Edna looked up from her book and leaned forward to look over the ledge.

"It is low enough," she said. "Let us go down there, Sylvia. I want to show you the pools."

Leaving their books and papers covered from the breeze with a shawl, the girls climbed down the rough rocks.

"We call this the giant's bath-tub," said Edna, when they reached an oblong hollow rock brimming with brine.

"I 'd hate to take a bath with some of those creatures," remarked Sylvia, her eyes on certain small objects of various shapes.

"I, too; and see how crusted the rock is with barnacles. How their edges do cut! Dear little things, they 'll go to sleep now till the tide comes back again."

"Go to sleep!" laughed Sylvia. "As if they were anything but gray stones!"

"Indeed, you are mistaken. I wonder if I could wake

one of those fellows up," and Miss Derwent splashed water over one of the stony clusters. They remained lifeless.

"The tide has left them too recently," she said. "They're not hungry."

"Oh, Edna, — I mean Miss Derwent."

"No, call me Edna. I'd like you to. Sometimes I can make them open those stiff shells and put out five little fingers to gather in their food."

Sylvia shook her head. "You've told me lots of fairy stories the last two days, but that is the most improbable. What are you doing?"

"Getting you a sea urchin." Edna had rolled her sleeves to the shoulder and was plunging her arm into the water. She brought out a spiny prize.

"What is it covered with? Wet grass?" asked Sylvia, regarding the blackish object with disfavor. "Why, you said those charming lavender candlesticks of yours, all embroidered in tiny holes, were sea urchins."

"So they are, but this is smaller. I'm going to try to get you some big ones. Do you care for starfish?" Edna swooped upon one and drew it forth waving its pink legs helplessly.

"Of course!" exclaimed Sylvia excitedly. "How lovely. I'm going to have a sea cabinet."

"Oh, there," cried Edna, "I see a big urchin now, but I'm afraid I can't get him!"

"Can't?" exclaimed a voice incredulously. "He'll give himself to you," and Dunham dropped lightly from the rock above the absorbed girls, who sat up suddenly to find him standing beside them.

Sylvia was first to recognize the apparition. "Mr.

Dunham!" she exclaimed, and the blood pulsed in her ears with the voice of the sea.

"Why, it is Mr. Dunham," said Edna, and leaning on her wet hand she reached up the other to greet him. Then he shook hands with Sylvia.

"It's a good thing you carry around those curls for people to know you by, Miss Lacey," he said.

Her upturned eyes were dark with excitement, her sudden color was high. There were little freckles across the bridge of her piquant nose. She was alive and glowing in every line.

"Where did you spring from?" asked Edna, brushing back a lock of hair with the back of her wet hand.

"First from the office, then from the Tide Mill, later from your house propelled by Miss Lacey, and ultimately from that rock, to discover by what magic there was some big urchin that Miss Derwent could n't get. I never knew one who was n't at her service, — the regiment headed by myself."

"On the contrary," returned Edna, "I distinctly remember when mother tried to get you to come to us here and you refused."

"Not refused. Regretted with tears. This is my party call, — the first opportunity I've had to make it."

"Well, you see now what you missed." Edna waved her hand toward the landscape.

"Don't I! From the moment of leaving the Tide Mill until I discovered your blonde and brunette heads bending over this pool my pilgrimage has been one long reminiscent wail."

"Oh, of course if you talk that way you will restore my complacency. When did you come to the Tide Mill?"

"Friday."

"In time for the storm, then."

"Yes, but Judge Trent was with me. We sang, —

'You and I together, Love,
Never mind the weather, Love.'"

Edna looked at him with curiosity and approval. A hundred incidents of their old friendship were returning to her thought. It was almost the same boyish head and face that topped this tall personage.

"You're just as silly as ever, John, aren't you?" she said. "I'm so glad."

He laughed toward Sylvia. "There's a reference for you, Miss Lacey."

"You please her. What more can you ask?" returned Sylvia.

It had all, all been a preparation for this moment. For this cause Thinkright had found her and brought her to the farm and taught her his philosophy. For this cause she had risen from the plane where Nat and Bohemia had been possibilities. For this cause Edna had given her her gracious friendship. The Prince and Princess had met in her presence, and she was as sure it was meeting never to part as she was that her earthly ideals could never be severed from theirs.

Edna and John both laughed at the earnestness of her naïve reply.

"She intends to keep me in my place, does n't she?" he said to Edna.

"Evidently," she replied, "but we're both willing you should sit down. Won't you?"

"I think I'd rather look at myself in your mirror.

Is n't that what you were doing when I descended upon you?"

"No. We have no need here for mirrors from month's end to month's end, for we never wear hats."

"Tush, tush," returned Dunham, lowering himself with some care among the projections of the inhospitable rock. "I 'm sure you both patronize mirrors for the pure pleasure of it. In the minute I stood waiting and watching up there I expected to see you turn into — who was what 's-his-name, Narcissus? Narcissi, then."

"Nonsense. You should use more local color. Say Anemones; but I warn you, we don't allow pretty speeches up here."

"That 's unfortunate," returned Dunham, "for I 've been in Seaton for months, and there 's nobody to make love to there but Miss La—" He nearly bit his tongue off in the suddenness of his halt, but he did save himself. "What is in this pool, then, if not starry eyes?" he added suddenly, bending over the stone trough with interest.

"Star*fish*," replied Edna. "See this one. I pulled it out just before you came."

The starfish was clinging pinkly to the rock, and beyond him lay the urchin, the blackness of its draggled spines turning to green as it dried in the sun.

"Who 's your friend?" asked John, regarding it. "Looks like a miniature Paderewski. Say, he 's getting up steam."

In fact, the urchin had begun dragging itself in a stately and scarcely perceptible progress across the rock toward its native pool. The three watched it.

"Is n't there any law here against speeding?" asked

Dunham with concern. "First water mobile I ever saw. Take his number, somebody. It 's a scandal."

"He 's number one," said Sylvia. "We 're going to get some more. I 'm going to have a cabinet."

"You are? Well, I don't think a sport like that would be a safe member of any cabinet."

"Here. I 'll show you the urchin I could n't get," said Edna. "You 'll reach him for us. My arm is n't long enough. See that big dark spot down in the corner? That is Sylvia's candlestick. A beautiful, lilac, embroidered candlestick."

"Who 'd have thought it!" responded Dunham, rolling up his sleeves. In a minute the dripping prize was being offered to Sylvia, who clasped her hands and drew back.

"Would you mind putting him down?" she said. "He looks so big and — whiskery."

"Oh, I 'm ashamed of you, Sylvia," laughed Edna. "Now you have to find another just his size, Mr. Dunham. She has to have a pair."

"She does, eh?" returned John resignedly. "I don't know what I 'll draw out of this grab bag next," and he plunged his arm in again.

"No, no, you must n't do that!" cried Edna,— "clouding up the water like that. We have to peer. Come and peer, Sylvia." They all leaned over the side of the pool. "See that little starfish? He 's lost a leg already in his short career; and those pretty anemones! Why did n't I bring a pail. I shall make an aquarium for you on the piazza, and we 'll have anemones, and undistinguished urchins who will never be in a cabinet or hold candles, and starfish, and barnacles. Oh, there 's a baby, John. Quick, *there!* Oh, I can get it myself."

She reached down in a flash and drew forth a tiny urchin.

"You startled me so," said John plaintively. "You said a baby, and I could n't see even a bulrush."

"Oh, I shall educate you in time," returned Edna. "There, Sylvia, that will be the infant member of your cabinet."

"It seems pretty low down to kidnap a fellow of that size," remarked Dunham.

"But she 's going to have a complete set of urchins, —from a little green pea to a personage."

"When you reach the personage class, remember me, Miss Sylvia. I have other references than this scoffing maiden."

Sylvia smiled. "But perhaps you would n't care to carry candles."

"Not care to burn candles before you? Of course I should."

"He 's at it again, Sylvia," sighed Edna. "It 's dreadful to have a starved man on our hands."

"Starved. That reminds me. Pardon me, ladies, if I look at my watch. Ah, half an hour's grace. I am going to ask you both to dine with me to-day. The procession moves at one sharp. If there are any signs of reluctance on the part of the hostess and her guest, I am to take one in each hand, with whatever fishy impedimenta cannot be lost, and repair with you to your cot. Miss Martha has spoken."

Edna laughed. "I 'd forgotten, John, just what a shy flower you were!" she said.

CHAPTER XXI

A SWIMMING LESSON

THAT afternoon Sylvia had her first swimming lesson. She had gone bathing several times with Minty Foster, but had never ventured beyond her depth. There was a flight of steps leading down to the water at the left of Edna's cottage to a little natural harbor behind the rock masses. No sandy beach was there. One dropped into sea green depths where only the amphibious could feel at home; but Edna was amphibious, and even Miss Lacey's shade hat, firmly tied beneath the chin, was sometimes seen to ride upon the wave as its owner indulged in a stately swim from one point of rock to another. Her mouth and nose on these occasions were lifted from the waters in a scornful grimace. Twice across the pool Miss Martha swam with systematic deliberation, then, her hat and hair as dry as when she went in, she ascended upon a sunny rock, and assuming a large woolen waterproof contented herself with observing Edna's gambols. This afternoon she did not go in. The shade hat topped her Sunday gown of black grenadine, which was turned up carefully about her as she sat on a rock and chaperoned her young people. A straw "pancake" softened the asperities of her granite couch.

Dunham observed her erect attitude doubtfully. "Can't I get you some sofa pillows?" he asked.

"No, pancakes are what I always use," returned Miss Martha decidedly.

"That 's true," said Edna, "especially on Sunday. Miss Lacey is willing to do anything on the spur of the moment except sit on it. She draws the line there; but Sunday is no day to be luxurious, is it, Miss Martha? — not for a person whose forefathers fought in the Revolution and ate leather."

"And it 's not a good day to go in swimming, either," returned Miss Lacey uneasily. "I do hope, Edna, you 'll come out before the islanders begin to return from church. Some of them might come along this shore."

"Dear Miss Martha," said Edna, "we don't have Mr. Dunham every day, to give Sylvia a swimming lesson."

"And I 'm just as scared as I can be," declared Sylvia, her curly hair and big eyes emerging from the mackintosh that enveloped her. "*I* never asked to go and see the land 'where corals lie,' and I don't think there 's any bottom to that water."

The cottage had produced bathing suits for the guests, and although Miss Lacey had scruples, and sat very straight, darting glances to right and left through the trees, and held a copy of a Congregational church paper prominently before her, she was glad of this opportunity for her niece.

"You can learn, Sylvia," she said. "Benny Merritt taught me to swim in that very spot, for I was determined to learn. I pulled out some of the poor boy's hair, I remember; so be careful and don't grab Mr. Dunham by the head."

Edna ran down a few steps, and throwing her cloak on

a rock clasped her hands above her, launched herself through the air in a graceful arch, and disappeared in the liquid emerald.

Sylvia lifted despairing eyes to Dunham. "She just does that to make me crazy," she said.

"We 'll fool her, then," returned John. "We won't go crazy. Now lift up your arms."

"You are n't going to put that thing on me!" exclaimed Sylvia, eyeing with scorn the life-preserver he had picked up. "I thought that was something to sit on." She pinioned her elbows to her side. "Oh, I 'd much rather drown than wear anything so unbecoming."

"Sylvia Lacey, lift up your arms this minute," commanded Miss Martha. "I wore one for weeks. As it was, I pinched Benny a number of times when I thought I was going down. Poor child, I distinctly remember a black and blue spot on his cheek where I kicked him one day."

"Miss Sylvia, I 'm growing awfully frightened," said John, while he buckled. "Do you inherit your aunt's warlike propensities? You don't need to pull out my hair. I 'll give you a lock of it in exchange for one of your curls." He had been observing the auburn rings that escaped under the front of the little oilskin cap.

"So ignominious," said Sylvia, looking over her person with disfavor.

"After you get into the water I 'll take it off the minute you say," returned Dunham. "Let 's make a bet, Miss Lacey. How long do you think she will keep it on?"

"Mr. Dunham, this is Sunday," returned Miss Martha.

"Oh, so it is. Well, I 'll go and do penance. Look

your last on my manly beauty, Miss Martha. We 're off. Which side of the house does your niece take after? "

"What do you mean? She 's a Lacey to the backbone."

John groaned. "Then the last hope has fled. I thought that perhaps the ingratiating Trent characteristics might come to the rescue, but now, expect to see me return bald and disfigured."

"Come on, you lazy people," called Edna; "it 's glorious."

"O-o-o, ' where corals lie, where corals lie,' " shuddered Sylvia, as she ran down the steps. "Just look at that mermaid. Is n't it fun? It is as poetical as those Elgar songs. She could just make up her mind to go down, and — *go!* "

"Well, shall we go too? " John offered his hand. She put hers into it. "Are you game to jump? " he added.

"In a life-preserver! " ejaculated Sylvia in smiling contempt. "Yes. There," meeting Edna's eyes as she floated at ease, "there is the poetry. Here comes the prose tumbling after."

Physical timidity was no part of Sylvia's nature; and now secure in the consciousness of the life-preserver, and that Dunham would take care of her anyway, and incited by the desire to appear courageous in his eyes, it was easy for her to take the leap. John jumped with her.

Despite her brave intention a gasping shriek burst from her as she struck the flood. She was prepared not to be afraid of the depth of the water, but she had forgotten its temperature.

"Oh, it 's so cold! " she cried.

"No, this is quite warm," said John. "The wind has

blown the surface water in. Wait a bit and you won't mind it."

He was treading water and steadying his companion. "Want the life-preserver off?" he laughed.

"Indeed I'd rather have it than the most gorgeous gown in Boston," she replied breathlessly, her spirits rising as she felt the strength of his arms. "Naught shall part me from it. Tell me what to do and I'll do it."

Edna swam around them with nonchalant, sidelong strokes, while Dunham went through the customary directions to the novice. She had been splashing valiantly for some minutes when Miss Lacey, forsaking her point of lookout, crept gingerly, with fear for her grenadine, to the edge of the rocks.

"Children," she called in a hollow voice, "the people are returning from church."

"Well, what shall we do?" asked John. "Edna and I can stay under for a reasonable length of time, but I should be obliged to drown Miss Sylvia. Does the situation demand it?"

"Benny Merritt is coming," still more acutely. "He 's very near!"

"Well, when he sees this pool he 'll fly with such hair as he has," said John cheerfully.

"Oh," groaned Miss Martha, "I've so often told him it was wrong to swim on Sunday."

"Keep him," cried Edna; "I want him. We 're coming out, anyway."

"Stay *in*," commanded Miss Lacey sepulchrally. "He may pass by," and she sank on a rock, spread out her Congregational paper, and examined the columns from end to end with absorption.

But Benny had no idea of passing by. He had heard the voices from the water and lounged toward Miss Lacey, but that lady declined to look up.

"Miss Sylvy 's learnin' to swim, ain't she?" he remarked, when he had stood unnoticed through a space of silence.

"Oh, good-afternoon, Benny," said Miss Martha severely. "Yes; a friend from home came unexpectedly, and offered to help her, and she and Miss Derwent — and — Was there a good congregation this afternoon, Benny? I thought best to remain here with my young people."

"Guess so. I heard 'em hollerin' as I come by a little while ago."

"Oh, Benny, you should have been there." Miss Lacey spoke more in sorrow than in anger; she was conscious that the object lesson he was now receiving would undo many of her faithful exhortations.

He directed an elaborate wink at the crown of her abased shade hat.

"Thought I 'd ruther go swimmin'," he returned.

Miss Martha turned the leaves of her paper with a loud rustle. The bathers were chattering and pulling themselves out of the water by the steps.

Benny's eyes brightened as Edna's laugh sounded on his ear.

"You did very wrong to come to-day, Benny," she called to him brightly, throwing her cloak about her and coming dripping up the steep steps.

Benny grinned sheepishly. "Come to see if Miss Lacey wanted any clams to-morrer," he drawled.

Edna shook her finger at him. "We don't swim on

Sunday. Understand, Benny? We go to church and sing with all the good people — don't we?" for Benny was changing from one foot to the other, alternately grinning and solemn under Edna's bright gaze.

"Yes, — when you don't miss of it," returned the boy, who had hung around the church steps to-day and peered within until he had satisfied himself that this was one of the missing days. He was a sufficiently docile attendant at the sanctuary whenever it meant staring for an hour at the back of Miss Derwent's head.

"And whenever we miss, it is for some important reason," returned Edna impressively. "This is Mr. Dunham, Benny," for here John and Sylvia came up the steps. "He is a friend of mine from home. This is Benny Merritt, who is going to take us huckleberrying and blueberrying to-morrow."

"Awfully good of you, Benny, I'm sure," said Dunham, throwing down the life-preserver, while Sylvia nodded at the boy and pulled off her oilskin cap.

"Oh, he is n't taking you berrying. You would n't care for it, would you?" asked Edna.

"I don't know. I'm like the fellow who was asked if he could play the violin. He said he did n't know, for he had never tried."

Miss Lacey looked from one to another of the bathers, who were now sitting in the sun. She wondered what Mr. Dunham meant by talking about to-morrow. Was he not instantly going to get into his clothes and start on his way to the Tide Mill?

The same question was flitting through Edna's brain. She wondered if her mother would approve her repeating the invitation to John to visit Anemone Cottage under

present circumstances. The young man himself took possession of the situation.

"Your arrival is very opportune, Benny," he said. "I 've just been wondering who I could get to sail Mr. Johnson's boat back to the farm."

Edna's eyelids lifted. She wondered if her old friend had determined to invite himself.

"You know where the Tide Mill is, I suppose?" went on Dunham, for Benny looked unillumined.

"It is Thinkright's boat he wishes to have sailed back," said Edna.

"Oh, yes," answered Benny. "I know."

"I 'm going to investigate your island a little farther, Edna," said John. "I 've found that there 's a hostelry here. I can't bear to tear myself away in ten minutes."

"To linger on Hawk Island is to be lost," returned Edna. "To change the song slightly, —

> 'To see it is to love it,
> And love but it forever;
> For Nature made it what it is,
> And ne'er made sic anither.'"

"Then here goes to lose myself," returned Dunham, "for you can't lose me. Benny, how are you going to get my boat home?"

"Don't know," drawled Benny; "could n't swim back agin."

"Well, you could take it over to-morrow and get back somehow, could n't you?"

"Miss Edna, she wants to go berryin' to-morrer."

"So do I, then," remarked Dunham.

"You shall," laughed Edna. "We 'll send another boy."

"It 's a worse problem than the fox and the goose and the corn," said John. "As Benny says, he can't swim back. I foresee a tragic future for Thinkright's boat, plying restlessly between Hawk Island and the Tide Mill, driven by the inexorable fate that hounded the Wandering Jew."

"We 'll send two boys and an extra boat," returned Edna. "The island is rich in both commodities."

She let Dunham go to the little hotel that evening.

"But it will be the last time," she said to Miss Lacey after he had gone. "Why should n't I have a house party while Sylvia is here?"

"A man is a disturbing element on general principles," remarked Miss Martha, "but I like him, and always did, from the moment he dusted a chair for me with his handkerchief." She cleared her throat with sudden embarrassment as she glanced at Sylvia, who was listening with serious eyes.

That day's errand seemed strange and remote.

"Where have you and Mr. Dunham met before?" asked Edna, turning suddenly to her guest.

Sylvia was prepared for this question. "In Boston, only once. He met me there to arrange some business for Uncle Calvin."

"He is quite overcome by the change in your appearance. I 'm not going to tell you the nice things he said about you. I don't approve of turning curly heads."

Sylvia colored and met Edna's kind eyes with a pleased, eager gaze. How lovely if the Prince should like her as did her Princess.

CHAPTER XXII

BLUEBERRYING

BENNY was still unfurling his sail when his party came down to the floating dock the next morning.

Dunham was laden with lunch boxes, pails, and sweaters, and Benny looked somewhat darkly upon him as his laugh rang out in reply to a speech of his companions.

"I was givin' ye half an hour more," said the boy, as they greeted him. "Ye usually" —

"Don't betray me that way, Benny," interrupted Edna. "I 'll have to confess, though, that this promptness is all owing to Mr. Dunham. He has pursued and hurried us since eight o'clock."

"I 've traveled on my virtuous early rising up to the present moment," remarked Dunham; "but now I 'll confess that I was n't so crazy over the sunrise as I was at it. It was a very unwelcome pageant in my room at 3 A. M."

"Oh, surely!" exclaimed Edna sympathetically. "Those cruelly light windows."

"Did you ever try a black stocking?" asked Sylvia earnestly.

"Well — occasionally," replied Dunham, regarding his feet.

"I mean on your eyes."

"No. Is that the latest? I 'm from the country."

"People talk about sunshine in a shady place," said Sylvia. "I think shade in a sunny place is quite as important. Always put a black stocking under your pillow when you go to sleep in a blindless room. The light wakes you, you draw the stocking across your eyes, — and off you go again."

"Yes, but supposing the stocking does the same?" objected Dunham.

The girls laughed, much to Benny's disapproval.

"You should n't toss around so, then," said Edna.

"That is n't kind," remarked John. "Benny, I trust there is something black on board to draw across these lunch boxes. It is one hundred in the refrigerator on this dock."

Benny took the lunch stolidly, and stowed it under cover.

He considered Mr. Dunham an entirely superfluous member of this party.

"He 's the freshest lobster ever I see," was his mental comment. "I wonder which of 'em he 's sweet on?"

The passengers jumped aboard.

"Guess I 'll save you the trouble of sailing her, eh, Benny?" asked John.

"You better guess again," drawled the boy, returning to his place and taking possession of the ropes. "I 've got to take care of Miss Edna."

"Oh, Benny," said the girl gently, "you know this is Mr. Dunham's vacation."

"Had n't ought to work in his vacation," returned Benny doggedly.

John was standing undecidedly looking down at him.

There was an evident and large thunder cloud across Benny's brow.

"Why the grouch?" asked John *sotto voce*, looking down at Edna. "Is it chronic?"

"There are monsters in this deep, John, with green eyes," she replied mysteriously, smiling. "They're tamable when young, though. Sit down a while."

"He don't know nawthin' 'bout these ledges, does he?" asked Benny defensively.

"No," replied Edna. "That's right. You get us by the ledgy places and out into the middle of the Sound, and then Mr. Dunham will take her."

"Oh, I don't know," remarked John, dropping down in the boat with a sigh of content as the sail filled and they glided forward. "I don't know that I want anything better than this." He leaned against the gunwale and regarded Sylvia, who was sitting beside the mast. The morning stars shone in her eyes. "Miss Sylvia looks as if she agreed with me," he added.

She smiled and glanced away. Neither of these two suspected that she was a spell-bound maiden skimming over the blue waves in an enchanted shallop to some blest island, where waited a magical berry that would set her free. How should they understand that this holiday picnic was in reality a pilgrimage.

John continued to look at her. He wondered if Nat knew what he had lost.

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Sylvia," he said after a minute.

She shook her head at him. "This is n't bargain day," she returned.

"Are they that precious?"

"They 're priceless," she answered.

"Really no use bidding?"

"Not the slightest." Sylvia looked off again.

"Well, one thing about them I know without paying. You 've given it away."

"What 's that?"

"They 're happy."

"Oh, yes." The girl smiled. How impossible it would be for either of her companions to conceive the cause of her happiness. They need not lack one day that which she had craved for weeks.

As they sailed on, Benny Merritt's stolid eyes glanced from time to time toward Edna. He was guiltily aware that they had passed the vicinity of dangerous ledges. The most uncomfortable feature of the situation was that he knew Miss Derwent to be equally aware of it.

"If he was to sail, I don't know what they brought me fer," he reflected gloomily.

He did know that it was necessary for some one to watch the boat and keep her off the rocks while the others were ashore, but Benny's elders have been known thus to fence with facts.

Edna caught his roving glance at last and raised her brows questioningly.

"Well," said the boy reluctantly, "I s'pose Mr. Dunham can sail now if he wants to."

The manner in which John received the sullen permission reminded Edna of many a past occasion when her friend had not contented himself with getting what he wanted, but managed to transform reluctance into grace.

"Dangerous coast around the island, is it, Benny?" asked John without moving.

"How do ye mean?"

"Treacherous. Hidden rocks to look out for and all that?"

"Not now. Ye could set a church, steeple an' all, where we are now."

"Do you carry a chart?"

"Yes, fer Miss Edna. I never look at it."

"Is it much trouble to get at it?" John rose as he spoke, and came over to the sailor, taking a place beside him.

"Dunno as it is," vouchsafed Benny. "It's in the locker." With some further hesitation he allowed John to take the sail, and proceeded to rummage for the chart, which he shortly produced.

"Now let 's have a look at this," said Dunham, giving back the boat into Benny's hands, but remaining beside him as he spread the chart out on his knees.

Edna could see that he was making comments and asking questions which Benny answered with increasing detail, and she turned to Sylvia with a smile.

"That is so characteristic."

"What?"

"Why, John wants to sail this boat; but he won't do it till he 's made Benny fall in love with him. So few men would care, or even notice, whether Benny liked it or not; but John was never content with merely getting his own way."

Sylvia looked at the speaker wistfully. "Do you admire it in him?" she asked.

Edna smiled. "Well, I like it at all events. The re-

sult is so agreeable. You 'll see him sail this boat home while Benny chaperons him with all the pride of a doting guardian."

"It makes him very fascinating to people, I suppose," said Sylvia.

"Oh, yes. John has all sorts of equipment for that purpose."

"And does he — does he think right?" asked Sylvia timidly.

"I believe he does n't look at things from our standpoint exactly, but his nature is fine. I used to consider that it was his vanity that demanded approval of everybody he had dealings with, but it seems to me now more like an instinctive desire to create a right atmosphere. Why should he care to win Benny Merritt?"

"Perhaps he wants to borrow his boat," replied Sylvia naïvely.

Edna's clear laugh rang out.

"I see you won't let me make a hero of him," she said.

"Oh, I will, I will!" exclaimed Sylvia earnestly, coloring. "Only you were speaking of his having his own way, and I wondered if — if he was just as charming to people when he was n't trying to get it."

"Ah, that would put him on a pedestal, would n't it?" replied Edna mischievously. "Let 's watch him, and see."

CHAPTER XXIII

A PHILTRE

By the time the party returned that evening Benny was still sitting beside Dunham, but the boy was doing all the talking, while John was sailing. Not even when they reached the ledges did Benny remember his proud privilege as pilot, but allowed his companion to conduct the boat's devious course while he expatiated on some races that had taken place earlier in the season. Had they not gone swimming together before luncheon, and had not Dunham's athletic feats and man-to-man treatment of the island boy completely subjugated him?

The tin pails they had carried were now in the locker, brimming with berries. The breeze that cooled the party all the way diminished gradually as the sun lowered, and at last the boat crept on slow wings to its mooring like a weary bird to its nest.

"And very lucky we were to get here instead of having to walk the length of the island," said Edna, as she jumped out on the dock. "John, how should you have liked to walk two miles carrying all the berries?"

Dunham shook his head as he bundled their paraphernalia out of the boat. "I should have insisted on sitting down to supper at once. It would have been a case like that of the 'Niger tiger:' —

> 'They returned from the ride
> With the berries inside.'"

Edna laughed and added, "'And the smile on the face of'— who? Not one of us would have dared to smile. Even now Sylvia is the only presentable member of the party."

John looked at the younger girl curiously.

"It 's a fact, Miss Sylvia, your self-control to-day has been something uncanny. Don't you like blueberries?"

"More than that," returned the girl significantly. "I love them."

"But not to eat," remarked Edna. "Of course Sylvia is too well-bred to love anything to eat. I don't know the fate she designs for those treasures of hers, but I suspect she intends to have them set in a necklace with elaborate pendants."

Sylvia colored, her eyes shining as she hugged a full pail away from the curious, laughing gaze of her companions. Every berry in it had been selected for its size and darkness; and when the others had begged for one plum from her appetizing collection she had guarded them jealously, and, refusing to allow her pail to be placed with the others on the return trip, had held it in her lap, superior to all jeers and the alarming threats of her ravenous companions.

Leaving the boat the trio bade Benny good-night and started up the hill.

"Now then, John, say good-by to your hotel," said Edna.

"Going to take me home to supper? Good work," he returned.

"Yes, and we shan't let you go back to that room full of sunrise, either."

"That sounds great" — began Dunham eagerly.

"But I can't trouble you," he added. "Miss Sylvia has told me how to banish the light. What do you suppose Miss Martha would say if I asked her to lend me a black stocking?"

"Better not risk it," returned Edna, smiling. "Sylvia is going to stay with me a week. With the addition of yourself we shall compose a very select house party."

"I came over here to stay an hour," said Sylvia.

"So did I," added Dunham.

"Well," replied Edna, "we 'll sail to the Tide Mill to-morrow and get you a few belongings."

"I trust you have n't had a moment's hope that I 'd refuse," said John.

"It 's too lovely for anything!" exclaimed Sylvia, taking one hand from her precious pail to squeeze her friend's arm.

She had been longing for a few days here to make her experiment. There was a promontory visible from the Fir Ledges —

They neared the cottage. "Now listen," said Edna merrily; "Miss Lacey has probably seen us. In a minute she 'll come out on the piazza and say, 'The supper is n't fit to be eaten. I should think, Edna,' and so forth, and so forth."

The words had scarcely left the girl's lips when Miss Martha bustled into view. "Here you are at last, you children," she said. "The supper is n't fit to be eaten. I *should* think, Edna, with your experience in the length of time it always takes to get home" —

The wind-blown, disheveled trio began to laugh. "Look at this peace offering, Miss Martha," said John, holding up the pails. "Have you the heart to do any-

thing but fall on our necks? If you had seen the drops on my brow as I stooped over those miserable little bushes."

"Yes, if anybody had seen them!" exclaimed Edna scornfully. "Go right up to the same room you had last night, John, and bathe that brow, and be down here in five minutes, if you want Miss Lacey ever to smile on you again."

Miss Martha was very proud of her dining-room at Anemone Cottage. She was wont to say at home that one of the best features of her vacation was not having to consider the cost of providing for the little household; and to-night the immaculate table, with its ferns and wild roses in the centre, was laden with good things for the wanderers who gathered about it hungrily.

"When I think how I labored to procure those berries," repeated Dunham, looking pensively at the heaped-up dish on Miss Martha's right, "it seems almost a sacrilege to eat them."

"Aunt Martha, he did n't pick a pint!" protested Sylvia. "He ought not to have one."

"Ask her what she did," returned John. "She has a sylph-like, æsthetic appearance, but I give you my word she has the most epicurean eye. She has n't left a prize berry in those fields. Have you seen her booty?"

"No. What does he mean, Sylvia?"

"He means to distract attention from his own laziness, that 's all."

"No, I don't. I mean to have some of those rotund berries of yours. Don't you, Edna? I 'll wager she has n't thrown them in with this common lot. Have you now?"

Sylvia laughed and colored. "No," she answered.

"Then get them," said John. "They 'll be good for nothing cold. Besides, I want Miss Lacey to see them. Where are they?"

Sylvia continued to smile and keep her eyes downcast, just glancing up toward Edna, who answered for her.

"Under a glass case up in her room, probably. I told you she was going to make a necklace of them. Anyway, *you* certainly don't deserve one. It is just as Sylvia said, Miss Martha, he shirked in that field in a manner that was painful to witness."

"Well, he has so far to stoop," returned Miss Martha, looking at Dunham approvingly. "It must be hard for him."

"Oh, you don't know him," retorted Edna. "There 's nothing he won't stoop to. He came with us and picked about ten berries, and then" —

"Miss Lacey," interrupted John, "you are so right-minded it will be a pleasure to tell you what happened. Before luncheon I went swimming with our guide, philosopher, and friend. Then such was the evil suspicion of these girls that they would n't take me to get berries until we had eaten luncheon. We then proceeded to demolish everything in sight except the boxes. I think Benny ate those. After that I felt as though I could snatch a few winks, but as no one of the party was wearing black stockings except the guide, philosopher, and friend, I relinquished that idea."

Miss Lacey looked up questioningly, blinking through her glasses, but the speaker proceeded: —

"Moreover, the girls would n't give me time to try. They dragged me out into the field and made me carry

all the pails. They were willing enough while the things were empty! Well, I 'd been patiently laboring about ten minutes when I began to realize how unreasonable it was for me to be taking a Turkish bath after the glorious cold plunge I 'd been having; then the look that the guide, philosopher, and friend had worn as we left him returned to me with an appeal. Of course you know that affairs are very serious between him and Edna, and I felt myself in a delicate position. The thought came to me: 'Why not be magnanimous? Why not cut ice with Benny which would cool myself? I 'll go back to the boat and let him take my place.' I did it. Ask him what *he* thinks of my action."

"Well, if you 've had a good time that 's all that 's necessary," remarked Miss Lacey placidly, amid the jeers that followed Dunham's explanation. "That 's what vacations are for."

Supper over, the party went out to the piazza, and Sylvia had no sooner seen Edna in one of the hammocks and John seated near on the boulder railing than she slipped back into the house, and to her aunt.

"Would it bother Jenny if I fussed around the stove a little, while she 's doing the dishes?" she asked eagerly.

"Why, no," hesitated Miss Martha in surprise. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to make something with my berries."

"Why, child. Wait till to-morrow. Jenny will make anything you want her to."

"No, Aunt Martha." Sylvia had the unconscious air of an eager, pleading child. "It 's an experiment I want to try. Please let me. I 'll tell you about it afterward."

"Well, of course if you 'd rather go into that hot

kitchen than stay on the piazza with the others; but what in the world " —

" Oh, don't ask me, and don't tell them. They 're talking about music, and they won't miss me for a little while."

Sylvia fled upstairs for her treasured pail, and down again, smiling and sparkling, into Jenny's domain. The good-natured girl made her welcome, and although Miss Lacey wished to come too, and see what her niece would be at, Sylvia laughingly closed the door upon her.

" I was never more astonished," soliloquized Miss Martha, amused and rather pleased.

She moved outdoors, and took a rocking-chair at the opposite end of the piazza from John and Edna. The latter finally interrupted her own remarks to glance at the figure sitting in the dusk. " Come over here, Sylvia. What makes you so exclusive ? "

" It is n't Sylvia," replied Miss Martha's voice.

" Where is she, then ? " Edna started to leave the hammock.

" Don't disturb yourself. She 's happy."

" Examining her berries probably," remarked John.

" That 's just what she 's doing," returned Miss Lacey, laughing.

" What do you mean ? " cried Edna. " Has that girl gone daffy ? "

" Now don't get up, Edna," commanded Miss Martha. " Sylvia is cooking."

" Cooking ! " Edna rose from the hammock. " At this time of night ? Why did n't you ask Jenny " —

" She would n't let me. I don't know what it is, any more than you do; but it was something she was bound to do herself, and I had to let her. What takes me is the

injustice I 've done that child. I never dreamed she had such domestic tendencies. I supposed she was all unpractical and artistic like her poor father, and to think here she has some recipe she 's so crazy about she can't wait till morning." Miss Lacey's voice trailed away in a gratified laugh. "Perhaps it 's something Mrs. Lem has taught her."

"Let 's go and spy upon her," suggested John.

The two stole softly around the house on the grass to the open kitchen window, where they shamelessly remained to gaze and listen. They saw Sylvia leaning over the stove, carefully stirring something with a large spoon. Jenny turned from the sink.

"Will ye be havin' another stick, Miss Sylvia?"

"There 's going to be a stick in it. Whoop!" whispered John.

"Only in the stove," replied Edna, as the fuel was added. "Cheer up, it 's something good, anyway."

"What are ye after makin', Miss Sylvia?" asked the cook.

The girl pursed her smiling lips: "A philtre, Jenny. Did you ever hear of one?"

"Sure I have. We use them all the time in Boston. Mr. Derwent won't lave me even cook with water that ain't filtered. Sure, we don't need one here, and annyway, how could ye make one from berries?"

"This is a different kind of philtre. I 'm brewing something that I hope will make somebody happy. A girl, Jenny. Me. This is to make me happy. That is, if it works like a charm, — and I think it will. I think it will." Sylvia repeated the words joyously as she watched and stirred.

"A love charm, is it!" ejaculated Jenny. Her mouth fell open, and she paused, staring, dish-towel in hand.

Sylvia laughed quietly. Her pretty, excited face, red from the sun and wind and with added color from the hot stove, nodded in the earnestness of her reply.

"Yes, — that 's just what it is," she answered.

"You 're in love, then, Miss Sylvia?"

Sylvia nodded again.

"Yes, — I am. It was n't at first sight either, Jenny. I don't know why I was so dull, — but it 's apt to last the longer. Don't you think so?"

"I do that, Miss Sylvia," returned the girl emphatically; "and sure a beauty like yerself should get whatever ye want without more charms than yer own bright eyes."

Sylvia laughed and dropped a little curtsy toward the kind Irish face.

"No, — no, it will take this," she sighed; "but with this, how I shall try, how I shall try!" The fervent tone suddenly became prosaic. "Have you any clean empty bottles, Jenny?"

The listeners at the window were dumb. Edna's expression had changed from glee to bewilderment. John took her arm and drew her away quietly. Together they moved noiselessly across the grass, but by tacit agreement not back to the piazza. For a minute of silence they strayed down the wood road, beneath the moon.

Dunham was first to break the embarrassed silence. "By Jove, for a minute there I felt *de trop*. The fair Sylvia was having fun with the cook, was n't she? I wonder what she 's really up to?"

"We say all sorts of things to Jenny, you know," returned Edna. "She 's the best soul that ever lived."

At the same time both speakers knew that what they had seen in Sylvia's face and heard in her voice exceeded pleasantry.

An idea overwhelmed Edna. An idea which so fitted into the circumstances that betwixt its appeal and the incredibility of Sylvia's words being serious, she felt like flying from John and being alone to think over the recent scene. If only Dunham were not penetrated by the same thought that had come to her! For another minute neither spoke, and then it was John who again broke the silence.

"Say, Edna," he suddenly ejaculated, "what 's the use? That girl was in earnest."

"Nonsense. She is n't a pagan," flashed the other.

"Well, I don't know. She had a father who was one. According to Judge Trent he was all for that sort of thing, and pinned his faith to everything supernatural, from a rabbit's foot to a clairvoyant."

Edna's face clouded with fastidious distaste even while she breathed a shade more freely. Evidently from John's tone her own diagnosis had not occurred to the hero of it. "She had a matrimonial scheme on foot when I first met her," he went on. "She was considering some actor because she wished to go on the stage."

"Rather strange that such a fact should have transpired in a first interview," remarked Edna dryly.

"No, because that was a session devoted merely to ways and means. But she 's not saying hocus-pocus and stirring caldrons on *his* account, you may be certain. She admitted that he was an old image."

"It 's too absurd for us to discuss it," returned the girl impatiently. "Fancy a ward of Thinkright's, under

his influence for weeks, having any superstition; to say nothing of the crudest and silliest one of them all."

"And who could she have up her sleeve, anyway?" asked Dunham meditatively. "Is there some swain over at the Mill Farm?"

"Of course not," returned Edna irritably. "For pity's sake stop talking as if you did n't think it was a joke."

"She was n't joking," replied John mildly, but with a conviction that smote his companion. "She was going to bottle the stuff, too."

"Of course. It is probably some sort of berry wine that she has heard of, and she wants to surprise us. It was unkind of us to watch her. Never let her know it, will you, John?"

"No; and if she gives me a drink in a few days all shall be forgiven."

Edna took a deep breath, feeling that a foolish fancied burden, such as one bears in dreams, had been lifted from her.

At the same time Sylvia's face, bending above the brew, haunted her, and the excited girlish voice echoed in her ears, bringing back her unwelcome doubts. Was it not precisely John who was destined to drink that precious wine?

CHAPTER XXIV

SYLVIA'S MYSTERY

DUNHAM and Miss Derwent prolonged their walk, and an hour had elapsed before they returned to the piazza. By that time Sylvia was sitting there in the moonlight with her aunt.

She had been telling herself how glad she was that John and Edna felt free to go away without her. It was only the assurance that she should not be in danger of hampering them that would make her happy in accepting Edna's invitation to prolong her stay.

How glorious the world must look to-night to Edna! This enchanting evening world with its dreaming waves, and myriad spires of fragrant firs stretching toward the luminous sky strewn thickly with pulsing stars. She shook off some thought that insinuated itself into her conscious desire. No, no. Her place was here with Aunt Martha. Her thought must dwell only on the possible artistic achievements of her future; her heart turn to no lover save the good genius she had sealed up in a bottle.

While her thoughts flowed, Miss Lacey talked. The latter was chiefly concerned with the menu for the coming week, and since Sylvia's descent upon the culinary department she seized upon her as a kindred spirit.

"Catering for men is very different from feeding

women, I can tell you, Sylvia. They 're not going to be put off with a little salad, or fruit and whipped cream, or fal-lals of that sort. We must have roasts and steaks now, besides what my father used to call Cape Cod turkey, — that 's codfish, my dear. Jenny's boiled cod and egg sauce is perfectly delicious, and fish does make brains, they say. I suppose Judge Trent would like to have us feed it to Mr. Dunham."

"I hope you don't intend to tell the house party that," remarked Sylvia.

Miss Martha giggled. "Well, things are comparative. Judge Trent is so surpassingly clever, and when you see this great big fellow in the office with him you can't help thinking of quality and quantity, you know; but he must have an average mind anyway, or your uncle would n't have any use for him. There they come now."

Two slow-moving figures appeared among the trees, and advanced to the piazza. "Welcome, wanderers," went on Miss Martha, repressing a yawn. "I think I shall bequeath Sylvia to you now, and retire."

Her niece knew that no implication of reproach was intended in this speech, but she dreaded that the others might misunderstand.

"I don't need to be bequeathed to any one," she declared. "I 'm like that poet who said he was never less alone than when alone. Fancy being lonely on this island in the company of these stars and waves and pines! Edna, when you wish to move your family away, and leave the cottage in the care of a hermit, I speak to be the hermit."

"I see you are properly captured," returned Edna.

"She 's fallen in love with the cook stove now," re-

marked Miss Martha. "I told her she 'd had a couple of spies on her doings."

Edna glanced at her guest. Sylvia's smiling, inquiring eyes looked from her to John, who spoke: —

"Yes, there you were stirring some mysterious caldron," he answered; "there in the dark of the moon, and there was something so fiery about your countenance and attitude that we did n't dare remain."

"You were wise," returned Sylvia. "I thought I felt some presence. Did n't you hear me say, —

> ' By the pricking of my thumbs
> Something wicked this way comes ' "?

"Well, we 're expecting to benefit by your labors in time," said John.

"I wish I thought you would," returned Sylvia dreamily.

"Oh, don't be so modest. Let us judge, anyway."

"I 've no doubt you would be a judge," said the girl meditatively.

"Say will be," he corrected.

Sylvia lifted her shoulders with a little gesture of dread.

"I have n't positively made up my mind that I dare try it on you," she said softly.

"Oh, you must. You 'll find me the most docile dog in the pack."

Edna listened with annoyance. She had suddenly become critical of Sylvia's manner.

The girl turned to her.

"Will it be necessary to go to the Mill Farm before afternoon, to-morrow?" she asked.

"Perhaps not. Why?"

"Because there is — because I want — I should like to stay here in the morning."

"Mr. Dunham and I might go over without you," suggested Edna. "Mrs. Lem could doubtless give me what you want."

The alacrity of Sylvia's assent to this proposition puzzled the hostess still further.

"Oh, no, there 'd be plenty of time if we went in the afternoon," said John. "Let 's take the witch with us for luck."

Edna regarded him as he stood against a boulder pillar looking down at Sylvia. "She may not need to use her bottle," was her reflection.

"Do sing us something, Edna," said Sylvia.

"Not to-night, please. I don't feel like singing; and when I don't it is an infliction on my poor audience."

"I wish you would, Edna. I 've not heard you," said Dunham.

"Just the reason why I refuse," she returned. "I 'm far too vain."

"She is the spirit of music," said Sylvia, regarding her hostess affectionately.

"But the spirit is n't always willing?" asked Dunham.

"No, not always," returned Edna, rising. "This is Liberty Hall, people, so don't move till you get ready; but if you 'll excuse me I 'm going to bed."

Sylvia rose at once. She would like to linger on this dim piazza for hours, and to fancy that Dunham stayed too from choice and not from courtesy; but she well knew that the charm of the occasion would vanish with

Edna, and even if it were not so, the Prince's companionship was not for her without the Princess.

Dunham turned to her. "It is n't sleepy time for you, too, is it?"

"Yes, I believe it is. I 'm sorry to be so — so unsporty."

"It 's all a bluff, too. Just as if we did n't know that as soon as the rest of us innocents are quiet and dreaming of blueberries, your window will fly open and off you 'll go on a broomstick."

Sylvia smiled. "I don't believe any one of this party will dream as hard of blueberries as I shall," she declared.

"Come now, you know you 're trading on a man's supposed superiority to curiosity, — only supposed, mind you."

"I never even supposed it," put in Sylvia with light scorn.

"Tell me what you were brewing on that stove tonight."

Edna's features were rigid in her impatience with John's pursuance of an uncomfortable subject. They were all in the living-room now, and she and Sylvia were standing with lighted candles in their hands.

Sylvia pursed her lips demurely. "I will — perhaps — if it works, Mr. Dunham."

"Works? Ferments, do you mean? Now you 're talking sense. No unfermented grape juice in mine."

Sylvia laughed and looked around at Edna, who was grave and seemed waiting politely. "Poor Edna. She 's tired," she thought, and nodding a good-night to John, she moved toward the stairs. "I 'll see you when you come up, Edna," she added, and disappeared.

Dunham watched the light figure in its swift ascent, and then turned toward his hostess.

"She won't tell us," he announced, smiling.

"How could you keep on talking about it, John?" said Edna, speaking low.

His face fell at her tone. "Why not?" he asked blankly. "Have you changed your mind about its being a joke?"

"Oh — I" — Edna scarcely understood her own attitude toward the little incident, and hesitated most uncharacteristically. "I think it was rather foolish and — and unpleasant, somehow. I — good-night, John," she put out her hand and he took it. "I hope you won't know anything about the sunrise, and that the cradle of the deep won't be too noisy for you. You need n't lock up. Just close the doors and window when you 're ready to come in. We don't insult Arcady with bolts. Good-night."

The following day dawned bright. Edna regarded the extraordinary light in Sylvia's eyes and her unwonted gayety of manner at the breakfast-table with mental questioning.

"The most annoying thing has occurred," she said. "This day of all days the carpenters for whom I 've been waiting all summer have turned up. I shan't be able to leave home. Could you people wait until to-morrow to go over to the farm?"

"I 'm afraid not," returned John. "I must go and report, as well as make myself more presentable. Who knows what to-morrow may be like? As probably as not Neptune will be throwing snowballs in all directions."

"And when he does, Edna sings!" exclaimed Sylvia,

turning her vital, sparkling gaze on her hostess. "You 'd better hope he does; — but not to-day, not to-day!" Her voice dropped to a low, exultant note, and then she laughed and blushed, meeting John's quizzical, curious look.

"By Jove, I believe the stuff *has* worked and she 's been trying it, Edna," he said. "It 's early in the day, but she 's lit up for a fact. How was your ride, little witch?"

"The grandest thing you ever knew. I 'd have taken you up behind me if I 'd known what it was going to be. There 's nothing like a bird's-eye view of this region."

"What are you talking about, Sylvia?" asked Miss Martha.

"Why, I rode all over Casco Bay last night on a broomstick. It was like visiting a wonderful picture gallery. There was a planet that cast a path across the water as the moon sank. The headlands jutted out into the waves, the cottages nestled among the trees. I went to the Mill Farm and looked through Uncle Calvin's window and blew him a kiss as he lay asleep."

"Did he have his hat on?" inquired Miss Martha, and John and Edna laughed.

"Why did n't you bring home your clothes?" asked Edna.

"I did try to, but the broomstick bucked so when I tried to pass through my window, I saw I should raise the household, and I did n't want to startle them; so I raced away home again above the waves, while all the stars sang together!"

"Have you been taking a foolish powder?" inquired Miss Martha, cutting her beefsteak.

"You 'll travel by wave to-day," remarked John. "I don't propose to go over to the Tide Mill afoot and alone."

"After noon, then."

"Very well. Have it your own way. You 'd get ducked less this morning, though."

"Yes, but something might happen to keep us. We might not get back in the afternoon."

"Why, she 's just crazy about this place, Edna," remarked Miss Lacey.

Edna smiled with the grace of a gratified hostess, but she did not raise her eyes. Sylvia was crazy about something, but what was it? She seemed transformed from the quiet, intense, grateful girl whom Thinkright brought to the island so recently.

As they rose from the table Sylvia eyed John curiously.

"I suppose you 'll go pretty soon to see Benny about getting the boat for this afternoon, won't you?" she asked.

"Yes," he rejoined. "You 'd better come with me."

"No," her breath caught, and she flushed so deeply that he looked at her in wonder. "I can 't. I have something to do. I — you 'd better go soon, for he might take the boat off for the day, you know."

John hooked his thumbs in his trousers pockets and regarded her at ease and at length.

"You 're the guiltiest-looking being I ever saw," he remarked. "I could n't be retained to defend you unless you could contrive a different expression. Now take the advice of one who knows, and don't go near that bottle again this morning."

Sylvia gave a breathless little laugh, and her eyes

shone through the embarrassment caused by his curious gaze.

"That 's just" — she began. "No. Go along, please. I can't go with you."

"Creature of mysteries" — he began.

"Do go on. You really must get a boat. I 'm ashamed to be borrowing Edna's clothes," and she ran away upstairs.

Half an hour later she was lost. Edna had been captured by her workmen. Miss Lacey was closeted with Jenny. Dunham lingered with the newspaper on the piazza, thinking he would speak once more with Sylvia before he left on his quest, but she did not reappear.

At last he went and stood beneath her window and called. He could see the white curtains swaying gently in the morning air, but no blithe face appeared between them. No voice answered his call.

Miss Lacey came out of the house, carrying a pot of water for the sweet peas.

"I can't think what has become of Sylvia," she said. "I 've been looking for her, too. I certainly did n't see her go out."

"All right. If she left by the window I might as well be off," he rejoined. "I did n't know the broomstick worked by day. I thought it was only the other end."

"I guess, to tell the truth," returned Miss Lacey, laughing, "Sylvia does n't know much more about one end of the broom than she does of the other."

CHAPTER XXV

THE LITTLE RIFT

WHEN Sylvia reappeared that noon she carried a pillowcase, which she held before her by its corners with care. She thought to slip around the house to the back door, but Edna and John rose from a corner of the piazza and greeted her.

Dunham viewed the graceful bare head and warm, demurely smiling face in its tree setting as the girl approached.

"Does n't she look like a dryad ?" he said to his companion.

"Oh," cried Edna, "so it was fir balsam you wanted to get, Sylvia. You were n't very successful, I 'm afraid. Your bag looks flat."

"Serves you right for not begging me to go with you," added John. "Edna has been swallowed up all the morning. I think it was very careless of you not to realize what a help I should have been."

Sylvia shook her sunny head. "No, I needed to be alone," she returned.

"Fir balsam, Edna!" exclaimed Dunham with sudden scorn. "What she has been after is herbs and simples for the caldron. I 've always yearned to know what a simple is. Here is my grand opportunity." The young man came toward the girl with outstretched hands. Sylvia stepped back.

"Don't touch this bag, Mr. Dunham," she said, her fingers closing more tightly upon it.

He laughed and seized the case.

Her lips set and her eyes dilated. "I mean it!" she exclaimed. "Don't touch it."

Her face had changed to intense seriousness, and under her flashing gaze his laughter died.

"Just a peep," he said in surprise.

"No, no," cried Sylvia acutely.

He could see that her breath was coming fast, and Edna observed it also, looking on at the little scene with a sense of perplexity and disapproval.

Dunham dropped his hands, and there was a disarming break in the girl's voice as she thanked him and ran into the house.

She gave Edna a look as she passed, and brief as it was there was an appeal and a confiding in that look.

Dunham shrugged his shoulders. "What now, I wonder?" he said, as he rejoined her.

"Sylvia does n't seem to have outgrown a love of schoolgirl mysteries," returned Edna coolly.

In a few minutes the family were called to dinner, and Sylvia was again the happiest of the company. The sparkle in her eyes seemed to have permeated her voice as well. By comparison the hostess's manner seemed unresponsive and preoccupied.

"What a pity you can't come over to the Tide Mill this afternoon, Edna," said Sylvia. "We could n't have a better breeze."

Edna gathered her straying thoughts. "I know it," she replied, "but the bird in the hand is the only one worth anything here. I have my carpenters now, so

business must come before pleasure. See if you can't bring back Thinkright or Judge Trent with you, to lend dignity to our house party. You 'd better get an early start so you won't have Miss Lacey patrolling the shore to-night and looking for a sail."

Edna did not meet Sylvia's gaze as she spoke, and the latter gained an impression of strangeness in her friend's manner. As they all strolled away from the table and out of doors, Sylvia made a movement to link her arm in Edna's. Was it a coincidence that the latter suddenly drew away, saying, "I 'm going to get my golf cape for you, Sylvia. It will be very cool coming back."

"I have my sweater," replied the girl, her gay face sobering.

"Yes, but you 'll like the golf cape, too, I 'm sure, as the sun goes down."

Sylvia thought she perceived a new note in Edna's tone, a courtesy, a perfunctoriness, that chilled her. When did it commence? Her thoughts flew back over the past twenty-four hours, and it recurred to her that last evening Edna, for the first time, left her room with a pleasant word, but without kissing her good-night. At the time she had not thought twice of the omission, but now to her awakened suspicion it seemed ominous. Edna had up to this time treated her with a frank demonstrativeness very sweet to Sylvia. Twenty-four hours ago she would have been certain that in departing even for this little trip of half a day her friend would have given her some slight caress. She watched now intently for the opportunity, but Edna brought the golf cape and put it on John's arm. "Be sure you take Benny with

you," she said. "You are n't a sufficiently ancient mariner yet for these parts. Now I must fly to the carpenters, good people. *Au revoir.*"

"Oh, Edna!" cried Sylvia earnestly, taking an involuntary step after the girl. "Could n't I possibly stay and help the carpenters and have you go? I 'd a thousand times rather. I hate to leave the island."

"Nonsense," laughed Edna. "Where is your loyalty to the Mill Farm? Good-by," and she disappeared.

It was not the reply she would have made yesterday. Sylvia was certain of it, and it was a grave maiden who stepped sedately by Dunham's side as they struck across the field toward the dock. It never occurred to her that if something had happened to offend Edna the matter could concern anybody or anything but Dunham.

Oh, how lovely the day was! How happy her morning had been! How wondrous would be this world of fragrant land and sparkling water if only Edna would have kissed her good-by! And to be going sailing amid this paradise with John Dunham! It was cruel that the very crown of all the blessed situation must be put from her as a joy, and accepted only as a utilitarian measure. For had she not already in some way stepped outside her rightful place?

Benny Merritt's stolid countenance grew still graver as the two drew near the floating dock.

"Where 's Miss Edna?" he asked.

"Not coming," replied Dunham. "Yes, I know it 's an outrage, Benny, but she has the carpenters. It seems to be an island ailment as bad as the measles for confining people to the house; but cheer up, you have Miss Sylvia and me."

"Got a real good chance to-day," grumbled Benny; "Miss Edna 'd like it."

"Oh, don't say any more about it," exclaimed Sylvia. "I 'm wretched because she could n't come."

Dunham looked at the speaker in surprise at the acute tone. He could have sworn that a sudden mist veiled her eyes.

"Oh, go on," he said. "Trample on my feelings as much as you like," and as he arranged Sylvia's cushions he gave a second sharp glance at her face. What had become of the sparkle and effervescence of the morning?

"Ain't you goin' to sail, Mr. Dunham?" asked Benny, amazed to see John settle down near Sylvia.

"Thought I would n't, going over," replied John.

Benny gave a sniff which was eminently cynical, as he grasped the tiller and the situation.

"Well, I know which one it is now, anyway," he soliloquized, as the boat crept forth across the harbor.

Sylvia was surprised too. Her heart beat a little faster.

"Oh, I 'm sure you 'd better sail," she said. "I want to think."

John laughed. "This is evidently not my lucky day," he remarked. "I think even now we ought to go back for the bottle."

"What bottle?"

"The one you were clutching so closely with that white bag this noon. That certainly must have been the real stuff. You remember we noticed the effect at breakfast. Then instead of taking me with you to the woods and drinking fair, you went alone, and at dinner were still more illuminated; but the last dose seems to

have worn off. I 'm in favor of going back for the bottle. Say the word and I 'll tell Benny."

Sylvia averted her face and smiled. "Yes, that was a good tonic," she said.

John looked at her curiously.

"But you must concoct something with more staying power," he went on. "At dinner you were scintillating. Crossing the field just now the light had all gone out."

Sylvia shook her head slightly. What a comfort it would be if she could talk out her perplexities to him and with him.

"You know," she returned, "it is only good friends who can indulge in the luxury of silence when they are together."

"Very pretty," he replied. "It 's very gratifying to believe myself more *en rapport* with you than either Edna or your aunt."

"I wish you 'd go and sail the boat," said Sylvia suddenly.

"I will, coming back," returned Dunham tranquilly, "for we shall probably have another passenger. This is our first tête-à-tête, remember."

"No, our second. I do remember," replied Sylvia.

In those forlorn days at the Association when he was always in her thought, what would have been her pleasure to look forward certainly to the present situation. The boat had left the harbor now and was bounding along its liquid path with the speed which made it the pride of Benny's heart.

John, leaning against the gunwale, continued to regard her.

"We don't need to recall that day," he said. "Why

remember the chrysalis after the butterfly is in the air?"

"Oh, it 's good for the butterfly;— keeps her grateful. However, I 'm not a butterfly. I 'm a bee."

"What? The busy kind?"

Sylvia nodded.

"You don't look it. At this moment you convey a purely ornamental idea."

"I know better, for my nose is sunburned. Besides, Mr. Dunham," the girl looked squarely into the amused eyes, "you must n't flirt with me."

"Perish the thought. But for argument, why not?"

"Because I can't flirt back."

Dunham smiled. "Can't or shan't?"

"Well, shan't," she returned.

"But why?" protested her companion mildly. "Surely you see that the situation demands it. The stage is all set. I 'll admit we shall have a moon coming back, but Judge Trent's hat may eclipse it."

"I have given up the stage," replied Sylvia.

"Never mind. You can still be an amateur. You can't be a summer girl without accepting her responsibilities."

"I 'm not a summer girl. I just told you I 'm a bee, and not a butterfly."

"But even bees are keen for the flowers of life. You 're not a thrifty bee unless you investigate and see how much honey you can get out of me."

Sylvia laughed reluctantly. "No wonder Edna calls you a shy flower," she replied. Her heart had a sudden pang of remembrance. "How beautiful Edna is," she said, meeting her companion's lazy eyes.

"Yes. You say she sings well?"

"Enchantingly."

"Does she sing Schubert?"

"Ye-yes. I think he is the one, is n't he, who wrote 'Death and the Maiden'? She sang that Sunday morning before we went down in the woods. How long ago it seems!" Sylvia spoke wistfully and looked away, and again a mist stole across her vision.

"Oh, let 'Death and the Maiden' go to — I was thinking of 'Who is Sylvia? What is she, that all the swains adore her?'"

"I told you, Mr. Dunham, that you must n't."

"I 'm only offering the bee a sample of my goods."

"That is n't the sort that it pays to store. That 's only fit for a butterfly's luncheon."

"What is your special brand, then? You 're rather a puzzle to me."

It was true. Sylvia did puzzle this young man, accustomed to being a centre of social attraction wherever he went. Her exceptional prettiness and naïveté had at first promised a *sauce piquante* to his golden vacation hours. The sauce had indeed proved piquant, but by reason of its difficulty of access. Most girls he had known would have been more interested in himself than in the blueberries on the day of their picnic, but Sylvia had been unaffectedly and convincingly absorbed. Most girls would have picked up the metaphorical handkerchief he had thrown last evening, and remained on the piazza with him for a time. Most girls would have secured instead of eluded his escort to the woods this morning, and under the present circumstances would have made hay in the exhilarating sunshine with a grace

and vigor which would have absolved him from all effort.

He was quiet so long that Sylvia stole a glance at him. His eyes were closed, and she thought he had fallen asleep; so she let her gaze rest. The effect of strength and repose in his attitude made her long for pencil and paper, but she had none. Never mind, she could sketch him later from memory; and to do so she must study him now. With a purely artistic intent surely it was no harm to dwell upon the lines of his strong nose and chin, the humorous curves of his lips, and enjoy the effect of the warm, wind-rumpled hair around his forehead; and so her eyes remained fixed and she was unconscious of the light that began to warm and glow softly within them.

CHAPTER XXVI

REVELATION

DUNHAM was not asleep. His half-amused, half-piqued thoughts rambled on. This niece of Judge Trent's was certainly an odd girl, with her preoccupations, her mysterious sacks of treasures, and her bottle of blackish fluid, her moods, her laughter, and her tears.

The fastidious Edna had been annoyed by last night's scene in the kitchen. Well, it was a strange scene. John recalled it now. He remembered quite well every word uttered by the rosy witch over her bubbling miniature caldron. She was concocting a philtre to make a girl happy,—herself. She had confided to the warm-hearted Irishwoman that she was in love, and condemned her stupidity that it had not been love at first sight; but since it had not been, the flame was likely to burn the longer. Did n't Jenny think so? And Jenny most reassuringly had thought so.

What sort of talks and beliefs had the girl been accustomed to in companionship with her ne'er-do-well father? Whatever her experiences, her atmosphere was one of strength and innocence. As this thought came to him with conviction, an involuntary desire to look at the subject of it caused his eyes suddenly to unclose.

The effect was electrical. Sylvia, from studying the features and hair, the outlines of throat and chest and

shoulders of her vis-a-vis, had unconsciously forgotten the model in the man, had forgotten Edna Derwent. The ideal, never long absent from her thought since that morning at Hotel Frisbie, was now filling her material vision in utter unconsciousness of her scrutiny. She leaned slightly toward him in her absorption, and a woman's heart was in her eyes and tenderly curved lips when John's gaze suddenly encountered hers.

The social diplomacy which from boyhood it had been his second nature to practice stood him in good stead now.

In that instant he saw Sylvia's start and withdrawal, he felt his own color mount to match hers, but he continued absolutely motionless except for letting his eyelids fall again.

"Do forgive me," he said after a moment, in nasal and languid apology. "I had n't an idea I should fall asleep. I 'll wake up in a minute. I 'm worse than a kid taken out in its baby carriage when I strike this air. Might as well chloroform me."

Sylvia was leaning against the mast, trying to swallow the heart that had leaped to her throat.

"Don't try to wake up," she replied after a time. She caught at his words as consolation, yet that look had been so deliberate, so wide. Could it be —

"My father taught me to sketch a little when I was a child," she went on, her breath still getting between her words most inconveniently. "I was wishing I had a pencil just then. You were being such a — such a docile model."

"Truly?" asked Dunham, lazily opening his eyes

again. "Tell me honestly, as man to man. I prefer to know the worst. I 'm sure I was all tumbled together like Grandpa Smallweed, and I 've an awful suspicion that my mouth was open."

Sylvia shook her head.

"Honestly? Don't spare me."

He slowly pulled himself upright, and Sylvia shrank closer to the mast. Her eyes shone like those of a startled bird who awaits only a shade more certainty of danger to dart from the spot.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "Were you really asleep?" she added naïvely.

He gave a low laugh.

"Excellent, tactful young lady. That is letting me down easy, even if I have been giving a good imitation of a fog horn. Really, I hope you will forgive me. There 's only one way to secure my good manners on a boat, and that is to make me sail her."

Sylvia allowed herself to be reassured by the off-hand sincerity of his tone.

"Go to sleep as much as you like," she returned. "I told you I wanted to think. I 'm very unhappy, Mr. Dunham," she went on after a moment, with sudden determination, and her recent excitement made actual tears veil her eyes this time.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"I have offended Edna."

"Surely not. How?"

"That is what I hoped you could tell me, else I would n't have mentioned it. Say, truly, if you know of anything I have done."

"I certainly do not," responded Dunham, with the

more emphasis that he suddenly believed he did know — exactly. The exactness was the blow.

One of his arms was flung along the gunwale, and he frowned down at the other brown hand while the Idea, the overwhelming, absurd, pathetic, ridiculous Idea, paralyzed him.

Sylvia had not fallen in love at first sight. Whom had she recently seen for the second time? For whom was she brewing the blackish potion? Edna had suspected. That explained her undue irritation last evening. What had Sylvia found to be lacking in her philtre? For what had she gone to the woods this morning? What mystery was contained in the white bag which she defended with such zeal? Dunham felt as if his brain were softening. It was the limit of absurdity to be connecting these semi-barbaric fantasies with this sane and charming girl. He saw how Edna had been confounded and annoyed. Submerged by the Idea, he could not at once lift his eyes to Sylvia, although it stirred him to believe that those bright drops he had seen gather might be falling.

Under the sordid circumstances of her life it was quite possible that he was the first presentable man she had ever met, and the thought that she had set out with the primitive instincts and methods of a Romany girl to take him by fair means or foul roused in him a wild desire to laugh, which could be subdued only by another look at the thoughtful, feminine face so at variance with the Idea. Her soft voice broke the short silence.

"You know the kindest thing you could do would be to tell me if you do know anything I have done, or even have the least suspicion of something. You 've known Edna so much longer than I have."

"Yes," responded Dunham. "But are n't you too sensitive?" he added to gain time.

"I hope not," answered the girl with childlike simplicity. "Thinkright says sensitiveness is only selfishness. I hope it 's not that."

"Why, what has made you think Edna offended?"

Sylvia's lip trembled. "Oh, little things. Tiny things. Things a man would probably not notice. She did n't kiss me good-night last evening."

John feared the speaker was going to cry.

"She did n't me, either," he responded cheerfully. "I did n't think anything of it. I should have been more apt to notice it if she had."

Sylvia gave an April smile. "She did n't kiss me this afternoon. She was strange and unlike herself. She 's been so all day. I 've been thinking that perhaps I ought not to go back," finished the girl slowly.

"Perish the thought," returned Dunham hastily. He was surprised to find how earnestly he objected to any such desertion. "You must go back if only to set your thought about it straight. Ask" — No, he would not advise her to ask Edna. The latter might tell her frankly. "Edna is very much taken up with her carpentering," he went on. "Let her get over that."

"She has been so very kind to me," said Sylvia. "I want to be sure not to impose on her, — not to be in her way," and she looked so childlike and self-forgetful as she spoke, that her companion, bewildered and flattered as he was by the Look, and the Idea, indulged in a brief and pointed soliloquy: —

"Whether she is a gypsy or a saint, or whatever she is, she 's a peach."

Sylvia's eyes grew wistful as the familiar home landmarks came in view.

"There is the Tide Mill," she said half to herself.

"Picturesque old affair, is n't it?" returned Dunham. "You were speaking a few minutes ago of sketching. That 's a good subject."

The girl nodded, and her eyes rested on the mill pensively.

"Just as coldly heart-broken as ever," she said.

"What do you mean?"

She gave a slight gesture toward it. "Can't you see?"

Dunham gazed at the old building, standing above the inrushing tide.

"It does look rather forlorn, does n't it," he returned, "with those blank shutters, tier upon tier."

"Yes, tear upon tear," answered Sylvia, with a faint smile at her own fancy. "One almost expects to see the salt drops raining down its face; but it is too tightly closed even for that. I was like that when I first came here, but Thinkright helped me, and I must n't get so again, no matter what happens. I was very, very mistaken and unhappy in those days. You know I was."

The last words were uttered very low, and Dunham nodded.

"And now I 've a longing, of course it 's a silly one, that the Tide Mill should open its eyes too, and cheer up. I can't bear it to go on making a picture of the way I used to feel. It 's as if it might drag me back again. To-day the feeling comes over me especially, because my heart is so heavy."

Sylvia's wide gaze rested on the mill, and she pressed her hand to her breast.

"Why, that 's easily done," responded Dunham consolingly. "Just let Thinkright give me an axe, and I 'll tickle that old pessimist's ribs until its eyes fly open and it giggles from its roof to its rickety old legs."

Sylvia shook her head. "No. Force would only do harm. Love must open the shutters."

"Love?" repeated John, staring at the speaker.

She nodded. "Yes, the same thing that opened mine."

He continued to regard her. "Do you know, you 're a very odd girl," he said at last.

"No," she replied.

"To talk about Love opening those weather-beaten, rusty old blinds. How could it?"

"I don't know; but it will. I feel that it will. You will see." She gave a strange little smile, and Dunham regarded her uneasily.

For the first time it occurred to him that she might be unbalanced. In that revealing Look which he had surprised a while ago she seemed to have given herself to him. He had been strangely conscious of proprietorship in her, a sort of responsibility for her, ever since. By his strategy he had secured her unconsciousness of discovery, and thus given himself time.

She kept her eyes fixed on the shore they were approaching, and he continued to regard her furtively, from time to time.

"We can get into the Basin now, can't we, Benny?" she called to their forgotten boatman.

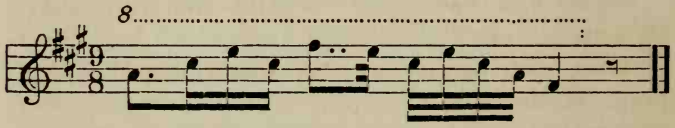
"Easy," he responded. "Suppose ye 'll be comin' out afore eight o'clock."

"Well, — Mr. Dunham will," responded Sylvia slowly.

"And Miss Lacey also, of course," added John.

According to the programme laid down by the Idea, Sylvia had an unfulfilled engagement on Hawk Island. She had yet to administer to him the contents of the black bottle, reinforced by the ingredient contained in the flat white bag. How with any consistency could she remain at the Mill Farm?

John flung back his head in a silent laugh and passed his hand across his forehead. The boat sailed toward the Tide Mill and under its cold shadow into the smiling, alluring Basin.

It seemed to Sylvia that months had passed since last those white birch stems had leaned toward her and waved green banners of welcome. "Ah. Listen!" she exclaimed. A tuneful jangle as of melodious bells fell on the quiet air, and then, like the clear tones of a silver flute, this phrase:—

"What is it?" whispered John, meeting Sylvia's eyes suddenly alight with joy.

"My hermit thrush," she murmured. "Listen!"

Again the sweet tangle of sounds; again the clear, perfect phrase, followed by melodious little bells. Dunham and Sylvia, motionless, continued to gaze into each other's eyes, and the girl's rapt smile stirred the man, for it was kin to the one he had surprised.

The boat glided silently toward the shore. Again the sweet flute sounded from the woods. "It is my welcome home," said Sylvia softly.

CHAPTER XXVII

MISUNDERSTANDING

A FIGURE was standing on the bank watching the boat's approach. It was Judge Trent. His hands were clasped behind his ample black coat, but instead of the usual shade to his eagle eyes a flat earth-colored cap, with an extraordinarily broad visor, gave his sharp face the effect of some wary animal that peers from under the eaves of its home.

The young people waved their hands as they recognized him.

"Come back, have you?" he said, without moving. "It's about time."

"Were you listening to that dear thrush?" asked Sylvia, as she jumped from the boat.

"I was, and have been for half an hour. The fellow's staying powers are something marvelous."

The speaker brought a hand around from his back, prepared to meet his niece, whom he scrutinized without a change of expression. She possessed herself not only of the hand, but his arm, and deliberately kissed his cheek.

"I hope you received my letter about the boat, Uncle Calvin. You don't know how happy you made me."

Dunham noted the surprised start, and received the frowning look which the judge sent in his direction. The rose leaf of Sylvia's face remained close to the parchment folds of the lawyer's cheek.

"Well, it was about time I made you happy, was n't it?" he replied.

"I ought to stay here now," said Sylvia, "and row you about, instead of going back to Hawk Island."

"Oh. You 're going back to Hawk Island?" The girl thought she detected a note of disappointment in the brusque tone.

"I 'm not sure. I have n't decided," she returned.

"She is going back," observed Dunham affably, "with me in about an hour."

Judge Trent glared at the speaker. Both Sylvia's hands being clasped about his arm, he was holding himself with conscious and wooden rigidity. This was his own flesh and blood, however, and she was clinging to him, and Dunham might be hanged for all he cared.

"My niece will decide that, and not you," he returned with surprising belligerency.

"Hello!" thought Dunham, amused. "Is Arcady getting on the legal nerves?" "We 're a house party," he explained firmly. "We 've come over here for some clothes. We shall be obliged to start back in about an hour because we have to take you with us, and we don't want to keep you out too late."

"Hey?" asked the judge.

"Yes," said Sylvia. "Edna asked us to bring either you or Thinkright back with us."

"Now that 's very untactful of you, Miss Sylvia," objected John. "Supposing she did say either of them. Don't you know, first come, first served, and moreover that Judge Trent is company?"

"Yes, I 've no idea that Thinkright would leave the farm over night at this busy time, anyway," replied

Sylvia. "Where is he? I must see him before I decide. I'm really not sure about going back. Perhaps, Uncle Calvin, it will be best for you and Mr. Dunham to go without me."

The lawyer's steely gaze was sunk in the soft blue depths of hers. In this mood she reminded him of his last parting with Laura. No woman since that day had clung to his arm.

He grunted a dissent. "John and I see enough of each other as it is," he returned.

"The idea of any one seeing enough of John!" was the thought that flashed through Sylvia's mind. What she said was, "Would you really rather I went too, Uncle Calvin?"

The sharp eyes under the visor saw the expression in Dunham's face at the caressing tone.

"Oh, suit yourself, of course," he replied briefly, "suit yourself;" but he carefully made no motion of his rigid arm which should discourage Sylvia from leaning upon it, and the three moved off toward the house.

Minty Foster suddenly appeared, dragging herself shyly between the trees. "I seen yer comin' past the mill," she said. Her usually stolid face was so eloquent of satisfaction at meeting Sylvia again that the girl dropped her uncle's arm, and, stooping, kissed the red cheek.

"Don't you want to go and see if Benny won't give you a sail while he's waiting for us, Minty?" she suggested.

"Y' ain't goin' back, are yer?" protested the child, round-eyed.

"I'm not quite sure," replied Sylvia. Each new,

trifling incident reassured her, and went to lighten her heart. Here was home and welcome, whatever had been her mistakes abroad.

Minty ran on to the waterside, and the three resumed their walk. The chime of little joy-bells and the silvery flourish of melody continued to come from woodland depths.

"What a pity we have n't time to find that darling hermit!" said the girl. "He must be near. Once I succeeded in discovering him, and I sat so quietly he did n't mind me, even if he saw. He was on the very topmost twig of a pine, so little and so brown against the vast blue. Uncle Calvin, I 'm so glad you bought the Mill Farm!"

"Well, so am I," replied the judge.

"Some time," said Sylvia, "when you get very — unexpectedly — rich, I wish you 'd buy the Tide Mill."

"You do?" grunted the lawyer. "What for, pray? Want to see a bonfire on the water?"

"Oh, dear, no!" Sylvia glanced around at Dunham. "Would n't it be tragic, after all its troubles, to see it burned at the stake?"

"She wants to tie blue ribbons around its neck and chuck it under the chin," explained John.

"Ah, I see," said the judge, smiling grimly as he remembered Sylvia's comments on the mill the first day he met her.

"There 's Thinkright," cried Sylvia, suddenly breaking from her companions and running fleetly toward the house.

With one accord the two men watched her greet the third by kissing him first on one cheek and then on the other.

"It was only one of yours, Judge," said Dunham. "If I were you I 'd call him out."

"I don't grudge it to him," returned the lawyer. "She 's making up to him for her mother's lack."

He waited a moment, hoping John would continue on the subject. He had thought often of his niece since his last visit, and in the past days had heard only good words for her; but Thinkright might be expected to be partial to Laura's child, and the Fosters were scarcely judges. He wished very much to learn the opinion of the girl which would be formed by a man of John's world and experience. Dunham kept silent as they pursued their measured walk, and the judge's desire forced the question.

"Well, and how do you find Miss Lacey, now you 've had a near view?"

"Oh — Miss Lacey. Yes. Brisk and busy as a little bumblebee. The round peg in the round hole, as you might say."

"H'm," returned the judge. "I 'm interested to know how she strikes a man of your sort."

"She 's all right, I tell you," returned John argumentatively. "You don't know a good thing when you see it, Judge. Domestic, capable, executive, cheerful," — John warmed to his subject. His heart had been made soft to-day, and he remembered the row of inappropriate poplars.

"Domestic? That 's a pleasant surprise. But how about manners and breeding? I 'm aware that what might pass muster with me might look very different under the lens of the society man. I 've only to scratch your legal skin, John, to find a society man. I 've always known that."

"Why, I should call her manners mighty comfortable ones," returned the young man. "She 's a practical homemaker, that 's what she is; and you 're a — well, it 's unintelligent of you to go on living alone, that 's all, with that wrinkled map of Ireland for your only appetizer."

The judge looked thoughtful. "I had n't got as far as that," he said. "My habits are pretty hopelessly settled, I 'm afraid. I don't think I ought to inflict myself on anybody at this late day."

"Nonsense. I know she would n't look at it that way, and perhaps this summer 'll do the business. When you get over to Hawk Island and see her" —

"See who!" Judge Trent faced his companion, and his shaggy brows moved up and down portentously beneath the overhanging eaves of his brown cap. "You mortal idiot," he thundered, "who are you talking about?"

Dunham's mouth fell open. "Miss Lacey. You said — Miss Lacey! Did you — were you asking about Sylvia?"

"*No!*" roared Judge Trent wrathfully. "I asked about Miss Lacey. What are you doing with Sylvia's name? Miss Lacey I say, and you 'd better say so, too!"

John mechanically drew his cap from his pocket, and fanned his heated countenance. Little did Judge Trent suspect how far this young man had rambled and swam and floated and sailed from that port where Sylvia might have been Miss Lacey to him. So it was *her* manners and breeding upon which her uncle desired a society man's verdict. What if he should describe to the judge

the Look, the Idea, and the Potion that awaited his home-coming?

Then there rushed over him the matrimonial bureau zeal with which he had done his best for Miss Martha. The combination reminiscence was too much. If it severed his connection with the law offices at Seaton forever, his self-control must snap, and all at once he threw back his head with a laugh which woke every echo that side the Tide Mill.

A black and towering shadow suddenly appeared at one of the farmhouse windows. Mrs. Lem, with Judge Trent an actuality and the splendid Mr. Dunham a constantly impending possibility, had been helmeted daily from early morn till set of sun. It was her imposing crest that John's storm of hilarity had brought into view.

The judge's fearful scowl relaxed, and he seized his companion's arm.

"I called you some names, did n't I, Boy," he said, when he could make himself heard. "Overlook it, won't you? I did n't know you were such a fool as not to be able to see when a chapter in a man's life is closed. Now let 's begin at the beginning again. You who know all there is to know about girls, you for whom the exception proves the rule that you can manage them with one hand tied behind you, — what do you think of the exception? Tell me now. What do you think of Sylvia?"

"No, no, Judge," gasped Dunham. "Let me off. I 'm exhausted."

"Brace up. I want to know."

"Well," returned John, wiping his eyes, "I think she made a tardy arrival on this planet. She 's too late for her century."

"An old-fashioned girl, eh? I rather like that."

"Older fashioned than you 're thinking of. She belongs in legends, and all sorts of stories that begin 'Once upon a time.' Do you catch the idea? She 's the exact opposite in every respect of that excellent lady we — no, I mean I have just been talking about, — her aunt."

The judge's face fell, though his eagle glance was sharp.

"Yet, it is the Lacey blood that 's done it," he said. "You mean she 's erratic, visionary, unpractical."

"Yes. I mean that I think her very charming bonnet, if she ever wore one, would have a bee in it."

"John, that 's worse than I feared," replied the judge dejectedly. "Confound Sam Lacey! She 's a rather engaging girl with it all?"

"Immensely so. In fact, to such an extent that most people would prefer to follow her moods rather than to revel in the excellent qualities of a good housekeeper."

"What does Edna think?" asked the lawyer.

"Oh, come, come, Judge!" protested Dunham. "If you have the man's standpoint, — a wholly admiring standpoint, I hope you understand, — that ought to satisfy you for one day."

"I shall go back with you to Hawk Island," announced Judge Trent briefly. "Sylvia shall go too. I wish to observe her outside this atmosphere."

Meanwhile Sylvia had borne Thinkright away, in front of the house to the shade of the Æolian pine tree, and pulled him down beside her on a rustic seat.

"Oh, Thinkright, it 's ages since you and I sat here last."

"Happy ages, I hope," he answered.

"Yes, I've been living a poem ever since I said goodby to you, until this noon. I've been walking on air, — living in a happy dream; then suddenly a bucket of cold water was dashed over me, and I came to myself."

"Are you sure it was yourself you came to?" asked Thinkright, for he saw the trouble in the eyes he loved. "Sometimes our dreams are nearer the truth than our mistaken waking notions."

"Oh, I wish this were a dream!" returned the girl devoutly; "for I've offended Edna."

"How?"

"If I only knew! I've gone through every incident of my stay, and I can't find a clue. I've been so careful about Mr. Dunham."

"About Mr. Dunham?"

"Yes; never to try even to attract his attention or behave as if I expected him to notice me."

"I don't understand at all," said Thinkright. "Do you mean that he and Edna care for each other?"

"Why, of course."

"But they have n't met often of late."

"I know; but of course she never could forget him, and they 're so much alike in all their ways and tastes" —

"Hold hard, little one. Edna Derwent has a court of admirers at home. It is n't likely she has ever had time to think of Mr. Dunham."

"Oh, you know there could n't be another like him," was Sylvia's quick response, given so devoutly that her companion regarded her more closely.

"I saw as soon as he came how things were, and would be; and I was extra careful. I've really almost avoided him, and yet, I 'm going to tell you honestly, Thinkright,

while he admires Edna so much, I seem to amuse him, and he has taken more notice of me than I wish he would; because of course all he thinks about me is that I 'm a Western product, and he is curious about my difference from them. I can't imagine how I did it, but in some way I 've offended Edna."

"How does she show it?"

"Just by a little coldness and difference in her manner; but it makes all the difference to me; and I want to stay with you now!" She came close to him and looked up into his face.

"There is n't a thing to do," he returned, "except to think right about it. I suppose you 've been remembering that?"

"Ye-es, some," answered Sylvia, with hesitation.

"That 's Mr. Dunham coming along with the judge now, is n't it?" asked Thinkright.

"Yes. Edna invited us yesterday to spend a week at the cottage, and we planned to come over to-day to get our clothes; and then last night she was cool to me, and this noon she was still more changed, — or else I noticed it more, — and oh," added the girl hastily, "they 're coming this way. Tell them you want me to stay here, please do!"

"Does Edna expect you back?"

"Yes, but" —

"And you have n't attempted any explanation with her?"

"No, but" —

Thinkright patted the arm near him.

"Can't have my little girl show the white feather like that. You and Edna both know how to think. There

is n't any power that can prevent your meeting on the right ground, and there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed. The truth, even about this trifle, whatever it may be, will set you free."

"Is this a secret session?" asked Judge Trent as the two men approached.

Sylvia's speaking countenance seemed to say that it was; but Thinkright arose and shook hands with John.

"Edna 's invited me to come back with these young people," said the lawyer. "She wanted you instead, I believe, but for reasons I 'll go first, if you have no objection."

"None in the world," returned his cousin, "for I could n't stay away just now."

"Sylvia, I think you 'd better pack your bag," went on Judge Trent. "Time is flying."

Thinkright deliberately studied Dunham's expression as the latter watched the young girl, whose indecision and trouble were obvious.

"Be game, Miss Sylvia, be game," suggested John. "Steamer leaves dock in half an hour sharp, as Judge Trent elects to have a late supper at Anemone Cottage rather than an early one in the shade of Mrs. Lem's pompadour."

"Then I 'm going, am I, Thinkright?" asked Sylvia, her eyes appealing to him as she rose.

"Of course you 're going," put in the judge authoritatively. "I 've had no visit with you yet."

"All right," returned Sylvia, smiling faintly at her uncle; but she took Thinkright's arm.

"I 'll meet you in half an hour," she said to the other

men, and started toward the house, with her cousin captive.

"Get your thought right on the way back, little one," he said. "You know how. You have nothing to conceal from Edna, I suppose?"

Sylvia did not answer at once, and Thinkright, after a moment, turned and looked into her grave, downcast face.

She spoke, after the little silence, with a collected dignity which was very becoming. "I'm ready to give Edna an account of every action of mine beneath her roof."

"Very well, my child. I have n't a doubt of it. It 's better for you to go back to-night. I 'm sure you think so."

"Yes, I do think so," replied Sylvia.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE POTION

THEY were a rather silent party on the homeward way. Dunham sailed the boat. Benny Merritt, fortified with thick slices of Mrs. Lem's good bread and butter, fell asleep and snored peacefully. He had bargained with Minty for this substantial repast as the price of sailing her around the Basin, and Sylvia had been quite concerned that he had no appetite for the afternoon tea which the others took before setting forth.

At Anemone Cottage the party was received with acclaim. Miss Lacey's cheeks had been very pink from the moment of discovering with her spyglass a fourth figure in the boat; and Judge Trent had no cause to complain of his supper.

The effervescent spirits which had this morning been Sylvia's seemed now to have passed into her hostess, and the glad eagerness with which the younger girl followed the other's mood was noted and appreciated by Dunham, who, when he could catch Sylvia's eye, sent her reassuring smiles, not one of which was lost upon Edna.

Sylvia almost persuaded herself that she had been imaginative and unjust. Of course Edna had been too occupied in greeting Judge Trent just now, and in caring for his comfort, to give her more than a smiling nod of welcome on her arrival, but Edna's good cheer at the

supper table was charming, and each guest in his way showed response to her mood.

"I 've another day of my carpenters to-morrow," she said after a while, "and I can't be sorry. They 're great fun. I 'm having the shed changed. The architect had suggested a more acute angle than my carpenter liked. I told Willis I thought he was improving on Mr. Lane's lines, and he replied, with that delightful drawl, 'Ye-us, he had sech a quick yank!'"

Another day of the carpenters! Sylvia was sorry to hear this, since it occupied Edna; and yet, one more day alone on the shore! Ah, what joy, if she could only escape Dunham and her uncle!

The evening was perfect, and when the party rose from the table they gravitated as usual to the piazza.

"What a clear horizon!" said Edna. "The moon will be coming up in a few minutes. Do you feel properly romantic, Judge Trent?"

"I feel the nearest approach to it that a man in my class ever does," he replied. "That was an excellent supper, Edna. If you 'll show me the way to the kitchen I could almost kiss the cook, if she would consider it."

Miss Lacey was listening and bridling triumphantly behind a neighboring pillar.

"You need n't go so far," rejoined Edna gayly. "Miss Lacey made that dessert."

The judge was unperturbed, as he stood, his hands clasped behind him. "In that case, Martha," he remarked, his impersonal gaze resting on the shadowy distance, "please consider yourself chastely saluted."

"This evening demands music," said Edna. "I 'll sing for you to-night, John."

"Good girl," returned Dunham, with an involuntary glance toward Sylvia's starlit face.

The hostess went indoors, and Sylvia started after her. "Do you mind if I sit near the piano, Edna?" she asked.

"And miss the moonrise? I certainly should not allow it. Stay right where you were."

"Of course, stay right where you were," said John quietly, "or rather sit here." He placed a cushion for Sylvia on the top step, and as she accepted the position he placed himself at her feet.

Miss Martha sank into a rocking-chair, and Judge Trent moved down upon the grass, where he walked back and forth, a shadowy figure in the evening hush, for the wind goes down with the sun at Hawk Island.

"Ask her to sing the 'Sea Pictures,'" suggested Sylvia to her companion.

John called his request, and Edna complied. She had scarcely commenced the first song when a halo of light appeared on the horizon, foretelling the edge of the orange-colored disc which soon began its splendid ascent from the silhouetted waves. The air was full of the scent of sweet peas, that clung in lavish abundance to the base of the cottage. The vista of firs framed the rising moon, which gradually flecked the water with dancing gold. Edna's voice flooded the air with strange melody.

Sylvia's responsive sense yielded to the witchery of the hour. Petty thoughts were swept away. John's eyes were constantly drawn back to her rapt face as the light grew clearer.

"The little stars are going out, do you see?" she murmured, and he nodded.

Soon Edna began the accompaniment of "In Haven," the one which Sylvia called the island song. The first notes brought a new light to her face, and she smiled into Dunham's upturned eyes.

"This is mine," she said. The words of the song came clearly to them, as the moon-path broadened and lengthened between the spires of the firs.

"Closely let me hold thy hand,
Storms are sweeping sea and land,
Love alone will stand.

"Closely cling, for waves beat fast,
Foam flakes cloud the hurrying blast,
Love alone will last.

"Kiss my lips and softly say,
'Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;
Love alone will stay.'"

Sylvia leaned her head against the vine-wreathed stone, and her eyes closed against the glory of a world that seemed hushing itself to listen, — closed against John Dunham, whose personality had so strangely permeated the song on the day she first heard it. What a different day from this, and how long, long ago it was! Then storm was sweeping sea and land; the hurrying blast, the beating waves, the driven foam flakes, had been an actuality. Now all unrest was in her own thought, while o'er sea and land brooded a peace that suggested eternity. The sweetness of that which alone would last, — how it appealed to her!

She could see beneath her lashes the moonlight falling on John's strong profile, and on the brown hands that clasped his knee. If, without word or look, he could

reach up to her one of those hands, and she could put her own into it with the knowledge that there was its rightful place, what would every storm of circumstance mean to her henceforth!

She came to herself with a start. Here on Edna's very piazza, enjoying her hospitality, she was indulging in a dream of theft from her. If her thoughts could be so betrayed, might it not be that some action had indeed given Edna just cause of offense? She remembered the day when, in the boat with her newly discovered uncle, he had told her that Dunham was straining at the leash to get away to Boston to Miss Derwent. Every moment of the latter's charming hospitality, and now her glorious voice, doubtless bound him closer to her. Sylvia knew herself to be not of their world, and perhaps she was more of a novelty to Dunham than she could realize. It was some strangeness in her, possibly some unconscious *gaucherie*, that so often called his attention to herself. Surely she should blush forever that, so soon as her thoughts escaped control, the subject began to attempt to betray her Princess and usurp her place.

"I must n't stay here. I ought not to stay," thought Sylvia in sudden panic. "I cannot be trusted."

The song closed. Dunham turned his head and looked up at his companion.

"Your song, is it?" he asked softly. "Let me in, too. It belongs to this place."

"Go and tell Edna how you like it," said Sylvia. "She always says it belongs to this island."

"And to her present guests especially," rejoined Dunham. "Won't you seal the partnership before I go?"

He reached his hand up to her with the movement she had pictured.

Her own were clasped behind her head. "No," she answered quickly. "Take Edna's hand upon it. Let her know how you love it, for it is one of her own favorites."

Dunham still hesitated, regarding the moonlit face, and Sylvia suddenly rose and, passing him, ran down the steps and joined Judge Trent in his measured promenade.

Miss Martha marveled at the ease with which her niece took possession of the lonely man who courted loneliness; and she could see by the way the judge turned toward the young girl, as she took his arm, that he was not an unwilling captive. "I should n't wonder if the child made Calvin real human," she thought, with a contented sigh. Sylvia was a possession which they held in common. Miss Martha seemed to see a future in which her relation with her ex-lover ceased to be one of armed neutrality.

Dunham, who had gone into the house to thank his entertainer, soon reappeared, with Edna beside him. They strolled off the piazza and down the rock path toward the golden street which joined the short avenue of firs, and Sylvia saw them no more that night.

She took care to be in bed, with her light out, before Edna came upstairs, only calling to her a cheery good-night as she passed her door. She hoped her friend would come in and stay for a little talk, but Edna paused only for a moment to exclaim upon the beauty of the evening and the pity of the fact that sleep was a necessity. Then she too said good-night, and passed on.

Affairs the next morning turned out quite as Sylvia would have had them. At breakfast she discovered that Judge Trent and Dunham had departed early on a fishing expedition. Edna was absorbed with her carpenters and their alterations, and Sylvia found no difficulty in escaping unquestioned to the woods, the pillow slip hanging over her arm.

This time when she returned at noon there was no one in sight, and she laid down bottle and bag in a corner of the piazza while she went to the well for a drink. Returning, she again took the flat, stiff pillow slip and went upstairs with it.

The men came home to dinner a little late. They brought no treasures back save those of John's imagination; and he regaled the company during the meal with such accounts of the morning's experiences as caused Miss Martha to entertain fears concerning his ultimate destination.

They all left the table at last in a gale of merriment, and went out on the piazza to drink their coffee. When they had finished Edna offered to show Judge Trent a shady hammock where breezes were warranted to lull all but the uneasiest conscience to rest. It was swung between two balsam firs, and the young people, leaving the judge therein, his cap pulled down over his eyes, went back to the piazza.

As soon as Dunham went up the steps his eye fell on a bottle on the floor in a corner. He recognized it at once, and pounced upon it.

"At last!" he exclaimed, and held it up to the light. "You 've been in the woods again this morning." He frowned at Sylvia, who laughed softly and colored to the

tips of her ears. "Aha! You look guilty enough for anything. I thought your eyes had an extra sparkle this noon."

Edna caught her lip between her teeth, and stood still, regarding her blushing guest.

A curious excitement took possession of Dunham. Had Sylvia left the bottle purposely for him to find it? "It has gone down fast since yesterday," he went on. "Remember, I saw it yesterday. Any one who comes in on this will have to be prompt and firm." He looked accusingly at the girl, who was the picture of embarrassment, as she stood there, laughing with a conscious air.

"Very well," she exclaimed suddenly. "You shan't tease me any longer about that. Here!" She seized a cup from the coffee table, and, emptying into it the remaining contents of the bottle, she handed it to Dunham.

He looked at her strangely.

"What is this? An elixir?"

"You say so," she replied saucily.

"Will it make me fluent, and sparkling, and gay?"

"You say so."

"Then I should let Edna have a share." He started to hand the cup to his hostess.

"No, no," laughed Sylvia, putting out a protesting hand. "She does n't need it. It 's not fit for Edna. Take it yourself, and — the consequences."

Dunham looked over the rim of the cup at the merry, defiant face, and drank. He then replaced the cup on the table, with sudden gravity and a look of tardy apprehension in the direction of Edna.

"It 's not sweet," he said.

"No," returned Sylvia, "except in its results."

Their young hostess stood there, rigid, her hand leaning on the back of a chair. John could not meet the speaker's eyes.

"I have a new story upstairs," he said abruptly. "I 'm going to get it and see if I can't induce one of you to read aloud."

He disappeared, and Sylvia regarded the empty bottle with reminiscent eyes.

"What did you expect to do with that stuff, Sylvia?" asked Edna.

"Something that will make a transformation in my life," replied the other slowly. "I want to tell you about it when we have more time. I know you have to go back now to your workmen,—but I 'm very hopeful, Edna, and, unless I deceive myself greatly, I shall be happy; and you 've been so wonderfully generous to a stranger, you 'll be happy for me, I 'm sure."

"We have n't time to talk now, as you say," returned Edna, with a measured coldness that caused her friend to look up, the light vanishing from her face. "Your actions have amazed me beyond words. Would you be willing that Thinkright should know the dreams and plans you have indulged in in this place?"

Sylvia stood dumb, transfixed, convicted of guilt.

"It does not come gracefully from your hostess to lecture you, I know; but against my will I have learned what I know, and — the disappointment has been bitter, Sylvia. Don't be vexed with me for speaking plainly. I can help you, I believe, when we get an opportunity for a quiet talk. Yes, I 'm coming, Jenny," for the girl

was at the door, bringing a question from the carpenter. "Excuse me, Sylvia. We 'll talk later."

Dunham, upon reaching his room, forgot all about the book he had come to seek. Standing still in the middle of the floor, he alternately went into paroxysms of laughter and scowled gravely at the wall.

"Nonsense!" he ruminated. "Edna and I are both idiots. I could see that Edna was back in that kitchen while we stood there. This is the twentieth century, and Sylvia has never lived out of the world."

So from moment to moment he would dispose of the Idea; but then there was the Look. That had been unmistakable. There was a chamber in Dunham's heart where that memory picture hung, and it seemed to him impertinence to open the door. As often as the recollection returned to him he recoiled from it. That look had been a theft from Sylvia, not a gift; but she had given him the potion at last. Again John laughed at himself for believing in her intention. Again he scowled at the wall because she had fulfilled it.

At last he shook himself together. An unacknowledged longing possessed him to see how she would carry herself now. He caught up the book he had come for, and went downstairs to the piazza. Sylvia had vanished. Disappointed, he went back into the house. Straying to the piano, he sat down and began to play a Chopin prelude. It was John's one and only instrumental achievement, learned by ear, and dug out of the ivories, as one might say, by long hours of laborious search for its harmonies.

Edna glided into the room. "If you don't mind, John," she said, "this is Miss Lacey's nap-time."

He dropped his hands. "Certainly I won't mind, if you 'll produce Miss Sylvia. She 's slipperier than a drop of quicksilver."

Edna stiffened slightly. "Perhaps she has gone to sleep, too."

"Well, you have n't, anyway. Come ! I hate those carpenters with a virulence that grows worse every hour."

The young hostess laughed. "I 've only to stay with them a little while longer. Come with me. They 're nearly through, and then we 'll get Sylvia and go off somewhere."

John followed lazily to mysterious regions at the back of the cottage. Sylvia, listening at the head of the stairs, heard them go. It was her opportunity.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WHITE BAG

EDNA'S responsibilities and nap-time came to an end simultaneously, and Dunham proposed that they take their book to the Fir Ledges, as a spot where the waves were not too noisy and the outlook was superb for such luxurious mortals as need lend their ears only, and not their eyes, to the story.

They came into the living-room as he made his suggestion, and saw Miss Lacey just coming downstairs.

"Where is Sylvia?" asked Edna.

"I don't believe she 's up yet," replied Miss Martha. "She went to her room at the same time I did, and she certainly did look tired out. I begged her to show common sense and not run around so incessantly. I told her to lie down and not move until she was rested. Foolish child! She 's so in love with this place she seems to think she 's wasting time unless she 's on the keen jump from morning until night."

"Would n't it rest her to come with us?" asked Dunham. "We 're going to the Fir Ledges to read."

"Well, I don't know," — Miss Lacey tossed her head doubtfully, — "it 's quite a walk down there, and her door is tight shut."

John looked at Edna.

"I suppose the kindest thing to do would be to let her

alone," said Edna. "When she comes down. Miss Martha, please tell her where we are, and ask her to join us. Perhaps she can bring you and Judge Trent with her. I see he is still motionless in that hammock."

"Yes, tell her to be sure to come," said Dunham; and the two left the house and started off through the wood road.

Edna did not regret her words to Sylvia, but she could not help connecting them with Miss Lacey's description of the girl's fagged appearance. So temperamental a creature as Sylvia would be prone to exaggerate a situation. Very well, Edna would take the earliest opportunity — bedtime this evening — for an open talk with her. Perhaps it was the excitement of having given John that which she had prepared for him which had left her pale by the time her aunt met her, — that and the sudden realization that her hostess understood her motives and actions. What a mercy that big, blundering, honest John Dunham had not connected himself with Sylvia's fantasies, although his joking had fitted in so well with her plans!

In the absence of other interests, and the idleness of pleasant hours, John had shown considerable interest in Sylvia. Edna had on several occasions resented the trifling signs of his admiration, fearing they might mislead so inexperienced a girl as her guest, even supposing the girl were not already making a hero of him, and bent upon his subjugation.

The thoughts of the pair were running along parallel lines as they pursued the woodland path, and at last John came to himself.

"Pardon my stupidity, Edna. Sylvia says it 's a great

proof of friendship for two people to be silent when together."

"Especially if they tell their thoughts afterward," rejoined the girl. "What were yours?"

Dunham hesitated a moment. "I was thinking it was a pity if Miss Sylvia has overtired herself."

"And I," said Edna, "was thinking it was a pity for you to pursue even a mild flirtation with her. She has n't met many men of your stamp, — she is only a grown-up child, as you have seen."

"I don't know," replied John deliberately. "I 'm making up my mind slowly but surely that she is a jewel."

Surprise and something like contempt flashed over Edna's face. "Is it since you drank the blueberry juice?" she asked, and the next moment could have bitten her tongue for its rashness.

Dunham showed no surprise. "Oh, it 's a gradual estimate," he said.

The girl laughed. "Very gradual. Is it three days or four?"

"Time does n't enter much into that sort of impression."

"Well, it should," responded Edna decidedly.

They said no more, but reaching the ledges seated themselves in the lee of a sheltering rock, and read, and gazed, until the swift passing hours brought them to a realizing sense that the anxious housekeeper would begin to be on the lookout.

"Well," remarked John with a luxurious sigh, "our friends don't know what they missed by scorning our invitation."

Edna said nothing, but the memory of her parting words with Sylvia began to be an uncomfortable one. The situation was emphasized by her guests' failure to join them here. She had not really supposed that Sylvia could feel easy to be with her again until they had been able to talk alone, but she told herself that she could not have left John to his own devices this afternoon. This evening she would surely make everything understood with Sylvia, show the girl how her behavior had appeared, and, she hoped, give her a new standard.

Miss Lacey and Judge Trent were seated on the piazza when they approached.

"Just in time," said Miss Martha.

"Where 's that lazy Sylvia? Not down yet?" asked Edna.

"No," replied Judge Trent; "I was just telling Miss Lacey I should go up and knock on her door. She assures me that laziness is not one of my niece's characteristics."

"Decidedly not," returned Edna.

"Quite the opposite," said Miss Martha. "That is why, if she sleeps right through supper time, I knew Edna would excuse her. I can't forget how she looked when she came upstairs. All the life seemed gone out of her. Folks come to those spots, if they will keep themselves keyed up all the time."

Edna began to have very uncomfortable sensations. She passed into the house and upstairs. Pausing before Sylvia's door, she listened. There was a little rapping sound within, all else was still. The girl knocked softly. There was no response. She turned the handle quietly. If, possibly, her guest were asleep, she would not awaken

her. Slowly, slowly she opened the unresisting door, and her expression changed from expectancy to blankness as she perceived that the room was empty. The fair white pillow bore no imprint of a curly head. The curtain ring was striking rhythmically against the window sill in the breeze.

Edna walked in, and looked about the orderly apartment. An envelope on the dresser caught her eye. It was addressed to herself, and the contents were as follows:

DEAR EDNA, — With a thousand thanks for the hospitality you have shown me here, I am going back to the Mill Farm. I have known since yesterday that something was wrong, but I am glad I came back last evening to learn how wrong. There is no question of staying now, because no good could come of our attempting to talk. My thoughts are my own; no one else can have jurisdiction over them. I cannot think of one act of mine as your guest which you could disapprove. Therefore there is nothing to discuss; but the grief it is to me to have offended you, you will never know. You can tell the others that this note confesses to you that I was suddenly overwhelmed with homesickness and felt I could not stay for argument. It will be the simple truth. They will set it down to my bad manners, and let it go.

We may never meet again intimately, and I want my last word to you to be heartfelt thanks for giving me the happiest experience of my life. We both know that Love will heal every hurt. I hope it is n't wrong for me to go in this way. I cannot stay.

SYLVIA.

Edna read the letter twice before she laid it down. She caught the reflection of her own face in the glass. More than anything else, it expressed vexation. Sylvia had crowned her unconventional behavior by the most annoying move of all. To a girl of Edna's traditions it was excessively mortifying to be obliged to own to others that her friend and guest had fled from her roof, even though they would have no suspicion that Sylvia had been driven away. In an instant she made up her mind not to destroy the comfort of the supper hour with the news, but to wait until later.

Hastening out into the hall, she softly closed the door again, and proceeded to make her own preparations for the evening meal. She could hear Dunham moving about in his room, and knew that he was forbearing on Sylvia's account from the whistling obligato which usually accompanied his toilet.

It would have been difficult for any average man to express irritability while discussing the appetizing dishes which Miss Lacey and Jenny had placed on that supper table, but the judge was displeased by his niece's non-appearance, and made it evident.

"I hope you 're not spoiling the girl, Martha," he said. "If she 's ill, say so; but if she is n't, don't let there be any carrying up of trays or nonsense of that kind."

Edna feared from Miss Martha's look that she was going to rise from the table and call the absent one, and she hastily interposed: —

"I assure you, Judge Trent, Sylvia is promptness itself. This is the exception that proves the rule."

"It seems to me that my niece is always proving rules

in that fashion," he returned, glancing at Dunham. "Of course, you are a polite hostess, Edna, and would n't allow a crumpled rose leaf to annoy a guest of yours."

At these words Sylvia's note seemed to burn in Edna's pocket, and her cheeks grew warm.

"The fact is, I 'd like to see something of the girl," went on the judge.

"I shall go up to her room the instant supper is over," responded Edna. "Do have some more lobster Newburg, Judge Trent. Don't you think it 's pretty good?"

"I think it 's perfect; but I 'd better not tempt Fate with any more."

"Oh, lobster here is n't the same as anywhere else. You can eat it right out of this sea as you can ripe apples out of an orchard."

"Indeed? The more the merrier, instead of the sadder?"

"Certainly," replied Edna with conviction, and the judge allowed his plate to be replenished. "You shall go out after supper to see my alterations," went on Edna. "Willis is going to let the other man come to-morrow to finish up, for he told me he 'could n't put off no longer goin' to Portland to have a tooth hauled.'"

The girl continued to keep the conversation in safe channels until the trying hour was over, then, asking Miss Martha to take the men around the house to exhibit her improvements, she ran upstairs again to Sylvia's room. Shutting herself in, she stood considering in what form she should put the news to those below. The gulf between herself and her guest still yawned; and, while she regretted to have hurt her, she felt that her words had not been unwarranted.

It was hard to forgive Sylvia for being so different from any girl of her own world, and yet to have strongly attracted so fastidious a man as John Dunham.

Edna caught herself up sharply. Was it possible that the least shadow of jealousy had influenced her treatment of Sylvia? She was given to uncompromising self-examination, and she knew that it had been a surprise to her to discover in the past days that she was not John's chief interest. She accused herself now of a snobbish inclination toward Sylvia, entirely aside from the perplexity and disapproval the girl had caused her. Edna knew herself to be accustomed to a pedestal. She feared that she had come to taking it for granted that even among her peers she should be preëminent, and that, as for this Western protégée whom she had patronized for Thinkright's sake, it had been a surprise to find her considered, socially speaking.

Edna set aside the tangled web of unsatisfactory thought, to be straightened and corrected at a more convenient season. Miss Martha might come upstairs at any moment. She must decide what to say to them all.

She wondered if Sylvia had fled too hastily to take her few belongings. She crossed the room to the closet, and opened the door. It was empty, but on the floor lay the pillow slip which Sylvia had defended from John so heatedly. Edna looked at the white bag with some repugnance. There recurred to her the appealing look in the girl's eyes as she had hurried into the house yesterday noon. Edna stooped and lifted the bag. It was heavy and stiff. She brought it out into the room, and opened it with some shrinking. What met her eyes were a number of sheets

of brown wrapping-paper. She drew one partly out. It was apparently smeared with dark paint. Hastily pulling the paper from the bag, she beheld a sketch of Beacon Island. She hurried over to the bed, and with eager hands drew sheet after sheet from the bag and spread them out. They formed three rows of sketches on the white coverlet, and Edna's eyes sparkled with interest as she recognized the subjects. The work had apparently been done with some blunt instrument instead of a brush. The effects were broad, after the manner of a charcoal drawing.

Edna compressed her lips as she gazed. Suddenly she crossed to an open window and leaned out. Fortune favored her. John Dunham was strolling in sight beyond the piazza. She called him softly. He heard, and she beckoned him beneath the window. "Can you come up here," she asked, "without letting the others know?"

Dunham assented with alacrity; but thought flies fast, and he had time for many misgivings as he mounted the stairs in bounds. Was Edna about to have it out with Sylvia, and was he being called as a witness to face a culprit and prove a position? If so, he promptly decided to have an acute attack of paresis.

Sylvia's door was ajar, and Edna standing by the bedside. "I needed somebody, and I chose you," she said over her shoulder. "Come and see what Sylvia has done."

Her tone was excited, and Dunham's heart beat fast as he paused at the door. What had Sylvia done?

CHAPTER XXX

THE LIGHT BREAKS

"COME here," said Edna, and moving aside she indicated the sketches. John drew near. "This is what was in that pillow slip yesterday."

Dunham regarded the rough work with large eyes. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "She has it in her, has n't she?"

"Just see the composition," returned Edna. "See the directness."

"What 's it done with?" asked Dunham. "Not a brush."

"No, some sort of a stump; and it 's such a queer color. I 've been trying to make out — John Dunham!" Edna's tone suddenly changed. "This is that blueberry juice!"

Dunham's mouth fell open. The two stood staring at each other, and, as many perceptions and explanations flowed into their thought, they colored slowly, and as richly as sunburn would permit.

"That is the love philtre, John," said Edna, when they had been a long time silent, and she caught her lip between her teeth, for her own condemnation pressed upon her more heavily with each enlightening consideration.

Dunham's feelings were inexpressible, and his one

devout thanksgiving was that Edna was ignorant of his own banality.

Suddenly she ran out of the room to the head of the stairs. "Miss Lacey," she called, "will you bring Judge Trent up here?"

The request startled Miss Martha into a sudden panic. "Dear me, Calvin, Edna wants us. I'm afraid Sylvia is ill. She looked it this noon. Oh, I assure you she never would have stayed upstairs from laziness, never in this world. She"—

But Judge Trent was already far in advance of the speaker, and Miss Lacey tripped upstairs after him, briskly.

"Come here, both of you, and I will make you proud," said Edna as they entered the room. "These sketches are your niece's work."

"Are n't they the queerest things you ever saw?" asked Miss Martha, adjusting her eyeglasses the better to peer at the brown sheets. "But there 's the Ledges, and there 's Beacon Island, and the West Shore, and our own swimming pool from over on the Point, and"—

"Judge Trent, do you know about such work?" asked Edna. "Do you care for this sort of thing?"

"Yes, in an ignorant sort of a way. Certainly I do."

"If you found Sylvia talented, you 'd help her, I 'm sure you would."

"Of course. Why? You appear excited."

Edna touched the lawyer's black sleeve as he stood in his customary attitude, his hands behind his back. As she went on it was evident that she fought with tears.

"Pardon me for asking if Sylvia has any money? Has any allowance been made her?"

"Not by me, and it 's not likely by Thinkright."

"It must be so! She can't have any money." The girl paused to swallow. Judge Trent regarded her, the corners of his mouth drawn down, at a loss to understand her manner, and ready to defy whatever accusation she was about to bring against him.

Edna continued: "Sylvia went into the field, and spent hours selecting the largest, darkest berries she could find. She came home and stewed them into a substitute for paint. You remember, Miss Martha, the evening you thought she was cooking. Then she found this rough manila paper, and contrived a stump out of something. Think how she must have longed to paint, how she longed for materials" —

"Why did n't you tell me?" demanded Judge Trent brusquely. "How was I to know?"

"I did n't know myself," returned Edna. "None of us knew. She was too modest, too delicate, to tell. She went alone to do these things, to try her powers. She had come to the place where she meant to tell me. She said so to-day. Doubtless she believed in her ability at last." Edna again seized the pillow slip and shook out a number of bits of paper that had sunk to the bottom. There fell out with them various stained, tightly-rolled paper stumps, which had evidently been used in lieu of brushes.

The three heads gathered together to look at the sketches of themselves and the family at the Mill Farm.

"By Jove, she has got it in her," repeated Dunham, regarding a drawing of himself as he had appeared to be asleep in the boat.

Judge Trent was examining his own penciled face,

frowning beneath the silk hat. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "I shall have to speak to Sylvia about this. Call her in, Edna."

It was the judge's last consecutive sentence for some time. All the company stared in equal amazement and apprehension, as Edna suddenly bowed her head on the lawyer's little broadcloth shoulder, and shook him with her sobs.

"Edna!" exclaimed Dunham, stepping forward, and he was unconscious of the severity of his voice. "Do you know you 're frightening us? Where is Sylvia?"

"G-gone!"

"Where, for mercy's sake?" demanded Miss Martha tremulously.

"H-home, to the Tide Mill." Edna managed to jerk out the words. "W-wait a minute."

As soon as she could lift her head and wipe her eyes, a process which gave Judge Trent infinite relief, she saw John's face grown so white under its tan that it helped her to become steady.

"She 's — safe, I 'm sure," she said. "We had — a mis-understanding, and it was all my fault, and I suppose she left this noon as soon as she could get away from us. She left a note for me. I found it when I came up to knock on her door. She said she was homesick."

"I don't understand at all," said Judge Trent. "Sylvia gone back to the farm, without a by-your-leave to her hostess? Confoundedly bad manners I call it." The lawyer's thought was creaking through unaccustomed ruts. He had been cheated out of Sylvia's companionship, after all, and his favorite Edna was in tears. He could *not* understand, and his frown was portentous.

"It is my fault," repeated Edna. "Spare me from explaining, because in the morning I shall go over to the farm myself and make things right."

"Just like that erratic father of hers. No manners," declared the lawyer.

"Calvin Trent!" Miss Martha's eyes sparkled through her excited tears. "I 'll thank you to be careful how you insult my dead brother in my presence. Your own manners in doing so are worse than anything Sam was ever guilty of!"

"Right you are, Martha," returned the startled lawyer with prompt meekness.

"Moreover," added Edna, indicating the sketches, "see Sylvia's inheritance from that father. You 've nothing to blame her for, Judge Trent, in the manner of her leaving. I understand it perfectly. Please fix your mind only on her talent. Come with me to-morrow, and make her happy by the assurance of your interest and assistance."

Judge Trent as he left the room muttered something to the effect that things had come to a pretty pass when he was forced at his age to spend his time on the water, tagging back and forth after a chit of a girl who did n't know her own mind. At the same time he recalled that Sylvia had returned to Hawk Island with reluctance, and that Edna Derwent was not the girl to shake him with her sobs for nothing; so he set himself to the task of being civil to Miss Lacey for the following half-hour, with intent to make amends for his offense to her.

Dunham, left alone with Edna, asked the question which was consuming him. Edna was placing the sketches in one of the empty drawers of the chiffonier.

"You must have had some talk with Sylvia this noon after I came upstairs for the book," he began.

She lifted her shoulder and shook her head with a gesture of repugnance. "Oh, yes. Don't remind me."

Dunham feared the worst. If Edna had accused Sylvia of giving him that potion, he would forswear the Mill Farm forever.

He continued: "Sylvia had already felt that you were offended with her. She mentioned it in the boat yesterday. Did your interview to-day go into detail? Did," — John cleared his throat, — "did you tell her what her offense was?"

"No," — Edna shook her head, — "and don't ask me what it was, John. I told her we would talk later; but I hurt her. I hurt her, because I did n't know." She paused, and her next words caused further relief to overspread Dunham's countenance. "I 'm glad that you understand nothing about it, John."

"So am I," he returned cheerfully. "I know you 'll fix things up all right. I think I 'll just wander down the island now, and find Benny Merritt and see if he was her boatman. Cheer up, Edna. I know you can get whatever you want out of Judge Trent, and by this time to-morrow night everything will be going as merry as a marriage bell."

A shrewd guess helped Dunham to find the object of his search at the post office, where Benny was seated on a barrel, pensively kicking his heels. Dissembling his eagerness, John nodded a greeting in his direction, and, passing over to the corner of the grocery sacred to the Government pigeonholes, asked for the Derwent mail.

The portly wife of the postmaster replied that the

evening boat was late and that they were waiting for the mail.

John accepted this information with proper surprise, and, turning away, looked through the window at the lights on a swordfisher standing in the cove. He thought he would first give Benny the chance to volunteer information.

He had already found that moments spent in the island grocery yielded rich returns in diversion. It was, in the first place, cause for rejoicing that the amiable but chronically weary proprietor of the island emporium, and his too substantial spouse, should be named Frisk.

While John stood there a girl came in and stumbled toward the post office window. "Have ye shet up the mail bag yet, Mis' Frisk? I want to git this package in if I possibly can. How much goes on it?"

"I 'll have to see," returned the portly one, waddling out to where the grocery scales stood on the counter. By the light of the kerosene lamp she leaned over and examined the figures.

"'M. Weighs jest two pounds," she announced.

The girl looked bewildered. "Why, they ain't but two handkerchiefs in there, Mis' Frisk. I don't see how it could" —

"Hey?" deliberately. "Two handkerchiefs? Let 's see." Another examination. "Oh, ye-us," wearily. "My stomach was on the scales."

Dunham had scarcely recovered from this when another girl, a smart summer boarder who favored him with a stare of interest as she entered, approached the proprietor.

Mr. Frisk in his shirt sleeves was viewing a too pre-

cipitate world from behind his counter. "I 'd like some marshmallows, please," said the girl.

"Ain't got any," was the response, given with entire amiability.

"Why," disappointedly, "you did have them last week."

"Ye-us, I know. I tried carryin' ma'shmallers quite a spell: but 't wan't no use. Seems if everybody wanted 'em. I could n't keep 'em in stock any time at all, so I give it up."

"Well, I do declare!" exclaimed the young woman. "And, Mr. Frisk, my mother is distressed because that cable message does n't come from father. If it comes to-night" —

"Oh, that 's so, there wus a telegram this noon. Ye-us, that 's so. I remember now. 'T wus from yer pa."

"Where is it? Why did n't you send it up, then?" John could hear the vexation fairly crackling in the speaker's voice.

"Why, I see he got thar all right, so I did n't know as thar wus any drive."

Some supporting sense of humor seemed to come to the girl, for John could hear her desperate chuckle as she went out with the cablegram.

"Handsome evenin', Mr. Dunham," remarked the unmoved postmaster. "Bo't 's late, ain't it?"

John assented, and a wizened old man passed him and approached the counter.

"Howdy, Frisk," he mumbled. "Got to have some more terbacca. Gimme a package o' Peace and Good Will, will ye?"

The proprietor beamed sympathetically. "Ye 'll

have to try somethin' else this time, Uncle Ben," he drawled pleasantly. "I 'm sorry, but the fact is my Peace and Good Will 's mouldy."

Dunham smiled, and looked over his shoulder at Benny. He was still cracking his heels gently against the flour barrel. The evening boat must be in soon, and then the boy would be out on the dock, lost in the excitement of its arrival. Dunham strolled up to him. "Good-evening, Benny."

He was surprised at the unresponsive air with which the boy nodded. John was aware of having recently completed the capture of Benny's heart by replying to questions concerning the gold football on his fob; but to-night there was no lighting of the young sailor's face.

"Come outside, will you, Benny? I want to speak to you."

To John's further amazement, Benny, instead of bounding off the barrel, complied with reluctance; but they were finally out of doors in the velvet darkness that preceded the moonrise.

"I want to know where you left Miss Sylvia," said John Dunham imperiously.

The boy hesitated a minute, then spoke grudgingly. "At the Tide Mill."

"How was she?"

"Able to walk up to the house," responded the boy irritatingly.

"Look here," — Dunham laid a heavy hand on the other's shoulder, and Benny struggled vainly to shake it off. "What 's the matter with you? Was Miss Sylvia ill? I did n't see her before she went."

Benny ceased his futile writhing. "Oh, you kin hold

on to me, I s'pose," he said sullenly; "but I don't care if you have got a muscle, and kin stay under water, and play football. Gosh durn you fer makin' her cry, I say."

The vim with which Benny exploded his accusation silenced Dunham for a moment, but he did not relax his grasp. "I did n't make her cry," he answered then. "Give you my word, Benny. Can't you have any sympathy for a fellow? I did n't know she was going, and I 'm all broken up."

Benny lifted his eyes, half relenting.

"What did she cry for? What did she say? Tell me, and I 'll give you the best fishing outfit you can buy in Portland."

"Did n't say nothin' much. She come to me all white around the gills, and asked if I 'd sail her home right away quick. She had her bag, and I see she did n't cal'late to come back. She kep' a-hurryin' me up, and after we got out o' the cove she give me a smile and thanked me for bein' so quick, and then she said, 'If you don't mind, Benny, I 'm goin' to sleep. I 'm jest as tired as I can be.' "

"Well, where does my making her cry come in?" In his impatience John gave an unconscious shake to his captive.

"You leggo my collar," said Benny, with a threatened return of the sulks.

"Certainly. Excuse me." Dunham instantly dropped his hand. "You said she went to sleep?"

"Yes, went to sleep!" repeated the boy contemptuously. "Do folks go to sleep with their eyes wide open? I see she did n't want me to talk to her, but I watched

her mighty close, 'cause I knew right off you was at the bottom of it."

"I? What possible idea"—

"Git out. Ain't I seen you not noticin' Miss Edna any? Ain't I seen you not sail the boat when you had the chance? Ain't I seen her eyin' you when she thought you wan't lookin'?"

Dunham groaned. "Benny, you're horribly precocious."

The boy glowered suspiciously.

"I don't know whether I be or not. I know I've got eyes."

"And what did you see to-day?"

"Tears. Hundreds of 'em. That's what I see. If she 'd a-busted out cryin' 't would n't 'a' ben so bad. I could 'a' said, 'Oh, you 're young yet, you don't know how many wuss things is goin' to happen to you, and I 've known fellers could stay under longer 'n he kin;' but I couldn't say a thing to comfort her when she kep' a-wip-in' away one tear at a time from her cheek, secret like. I knew she 'd ben scrappin' with you, or else that you 'd turned around and ben sweet on Miss Edna."

"Nothing of the sort, Benny. You 're all off in both guesses. Miss Sylvia just went home a little sooner than she expected, and Miss Derwent is going over to-morrow to spend the day with her. You 're going to take her over yourself."

"See anythin' green in my eyes?" drawled Benny. "I 'll bet you ain't goin' over, then," he added cynically.

"Of course I would n't butt in on the young ladies' day together," returned John. Benny's recital had touched him, but he could not forbear a smile at the

youngster's courage of conviction. "I tell you, I 'm the aggrieved party in this matter," he added.

"Oh, git out," returned the boy. "Butt in, nawthin'. You go over there and fix it up with her. Say," hopefully, "I 'll sail ye over to-night if ye want to. Plenty o' moon."

"You 're awfully good, Benny, but you can take it from me, I should n't be welcome."

The boy looked staggered for the first time.

"Has she turned you down ?" he asked in a low tone. "That 's so, she 'd a cried jest the same if she had. Say, has she ?"

Dunham made a significant gesture.

"Next time don't you be so sure you know it all, Benny," he replied.

CHAPTER XXXI

RECONCILIATION

THAT afternoon, while Benny had been surreptitiously watching Sylvia's irrepressible tears, she kept her face toward the Tide Mill without one backward look. The boat, as it cut through the water, rising and falling in the strong, steady wind, seemed ever rhythmically repeating the line of the island song: —

> "Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day
> Joy, sea-swept may fade to-day."

She tried to look away from her hurt and humiliation as she looked away from Anemone Cottage; tried to remember only that at the Mill Farm was Thinkright, with his confidence and calm. Oh, to be calm and fearless once more!

> "Love alone will stay!"

A light seemed shed now on many a talk of Thinkright's concerning the only Love that would stay, — abide. The only Love that bred peace, — the peace that passeth understanding.

Winds and waves sang on: —

> "Joy, sea-swept may fade to-day;
> Love alone will stay."

and above the human sweetness of the song Sylvia felt that there dwelt a deeper, higher meaning, but she could

not attain to it now. Thought was pain. What she longed to do was to wipe the last week from her remembrance. The last week. She suddenly remembered its high light: the thrill with which she had worked over her pictures and the power she felt in her finger tips. Her sketches, — she had forgotten them. Her aunt, Edna, would find them. What matter? Nothing at Hawk Island mattered.

She turned her thought to the farm. The Basin was sparkling and waiting for her, the birches were bending forward in welcome. Thinkright, and the dear Fosters, she loved them all; and her boat, whose dainty oars she had never handled. Home, a dear home, awaited her. She hoped the uncontrollable fountain of her tears would dry before the Tide Mill should feel her presence and seem to say: "I told you so. Better never to believe in the sunshine. Then you cannot suffer a pang in finding that, after all, the world holds naught but bitterness and disappointment."

When the old mill finally came in sight, Sylvia averted her face. While the boat stole through its cold shadow she fixed her eyes on the smiling lake beyond, all alive in the rising tide, and glad, to its last sombre little evergreen pushing sap into the hopeful brightness of its tips.

"Thank you so much, Benny," she said, when finally she stood on the shore. "I 've been a very stupid passenger, but I hope you 'll forgive me."

"I did n't want to talk," returned Benny awkwardly. What he thought was, "I only wish 't I was big enough to punch his head."

"I got time to carry your bag up to the house, and I 'm goin' to," he added firmly.

Sylvia demurred, for she did not wish the boy to see the surprise her return would occasion; but he refused to listen to her assurances, and, dropping his anchor in the depths beside a certain rock, he strode off manfully by her side with the bag, only wishing that it were twice as heavy.

Fortune favored Sylvia, for Thinkright was the only member of the family who saw her emerge from the woods. He came down the hill to meet the newcomers, and, noting Benny's burden, understood that the girl's return was permanent.

He advanced in silence, smiling. Sylvia smiled too, bravely. "The bad penny, you see," she said, as he drew near.

"I 'm glad to get the penny on any terms," he replied.

"Will you pay Benny, please, Thinkright? I had n't any money with me."

The boy took the silver and gave up the bag, casting a furtive glance at Sylvia.

"Ye don't want me to come back for yer to-morrer?" he said.

"No, thank you, Benny. Good-by." She gave him an April smile, and he returned to the boat muttering to himself, his fist clenched and restless.

The girl met Thinkright's kind, questioning look.

"I 've shown the white feather after all," she said; "but would you mind not asking me anything, — just for to-day?"

"Certainly I won't, little one. Don't tell me until you wish to."

Sylvia rested her hand on his shoulder as they walked up the hill. "I shall tell the others, if they ask, that I

was homesick. Never was a truer word spoken. People have died of homesickness, have n't they, Thinkright? I thought I might die of it if I had to stay there one more night."

Her companion did not smile at this extravagance. He was wise, and knew that a wound which is resisted and thrown off by experienced and case-hardened maturity does often crush the thin skin of youth.

"Well, we shall all be thoroughly glad to get you back again, dear," he replied. "There 's been a yawning hole in the house ever since you left, and Minty actually shed tears last evening in her disappointment that you did n't stay."

"Dear little Minty," said Sylvia, gratefully.

"The tears and affection were very genuine," said Thinkright smiling, "but the situation is more acute owing to the fact of your rowboat, and that she has been forbidden to use it without you."

"Poor little thing. I don't wonder. I 'll take her soon, or she 'll take me; but this afternoon can I stay with you a while? Have you time to talk to me, and read with me? I 'm a heathen, and need a missionary."

"You 're not; but I 'll help you to know you 're not. I was going to mend a fence, but" —

"Oh, no, mend me!" returned Sylvia.

Benny Merritt found that Mr. Dunham had spoken the truth, and that he was summoned early on the following day to take Miss Derwent to the Mill Farm; and when she appeared at the dock at the appointed hour, it proved that she was escorted by Judge Trent, rather grim of visage as he shot out sharp glances from beneath the earth-colored cap. He was not particularly fond of

sailing; he greatly approved of Jenny's cooking; everything had been unusually comfortable and to his mind until Sylvia's foolish move upset everything and everybody. It was with reluctance that he accompanied Edna this morning, but her earnestness would not be gainsaid. He was forced to listen to assurances of his niece's gift, of the desirability of developing it, of the strength of the motive-spirit she had evidenced in the pains taken to carry out her desire. Then Edna unfolded to him the plans that had come to her during a wakeful night, and bespoke his coöperation. The judge scowled at the passing billows, and listened. Edna was tactful and diplomatic. She did not overdo the matter. She allowed silences to fall in which her taciturn listener might digest the food she had offered his family pride and ambition. She talked of other matters, and was just making a reference to the judge's gift to his niece of the rowboat, when Benny steered in toward the mill, and dropped his sail at the nearest spot which at this tide was practicable.

"There is the new boat, now," cried Edna; "and Sylvia and Minty are in it."

As she and the judge walked along the shore toward the little boathouse, she waved her handkerchief toward the occupants of the Rosy Cloud. It was Minty who first caught sight of the visitors.

"There 's somebody a-wavin'," she said, and Sylvia stopped rowing and looked over her shoulder. She had been finding the lightness and responsiveness of her boat exhilarating, and her eyes were beaming until she caught sight of the visitors.

Even Minty saw the change that crossed her face. "I

wish 't they had n't come, too," she said regretfully. "Don't go in yet, Miss Sylvia."

"You see, Uncle Calvin gave me the boat, and he has never been inside of it," returned Sylvia, beginning to row toward shore. "You shall take her again, Minty, as soon as we are through."

She was surprised that Edna had come so promptly. She could still see the cold disapproval in her friend's face the last time she had looked upon it. What a contrast she saw now in its beaming expression!

Miss Derwent was uncomfortable, for she knew she could not be welcome, and she longed for five minutes alone with Sylvia; but Judge Trent must be considered, and she had to curb her impatience as best she might.

The judge watched the approach of the boat critically. "You go too deep, Sylvia, you go too deep," he announced as she drew near. "Minty, you row like a windmill. You 'll have to take some lessons, too."

"Minty rows a good strong stroke," said Sylvia; "but she has always had such a heavy boat that she 'll have to learn that this does n't require the same effort." How strange it seemed that any one at this juncture could consider the form of rowing! When one's heart was beating and one's brain struggling to decide how to meet a difficult situation, as if anything mattered, except to reach the shore and not to forget the laws of hospitality.

"Well, well, miss," went on the judge, when he could see his niece's flushed face, "this running away is pretty business. What have you to say for yourself?"

"She need n't say anything," said Edna. "I told him you were homesick, Sylvia, and it was reason enough. You had ample reason for leaving."

The speaker made the deliberate addition significantly, and caught her friend's eye with an appeal in which Sylvia could see the flag of truce. The earnestness and sweetness of her tone and look astounded Sylvia; for had so simple an action as her coming home had power to alter such strong feeling as must goad a hostess before she can so rebuke the guest beneath her roof?

"Are you going to come ashore and let us interrupt your sport?" went on Edna.

"Unless you and Uncle Calvin care to come out for a little row," returned Sylvia. "It 's a wonderful boat, Uncle Calvin."

"Yes, Edna, get in," said the judge. "You take the tiller, and I 'll show Sylvia how to avoid the windmill habit. Another time for you, Minty," he added, and the child jumped out obediently.

Little did the prosaic lawyer suspect the preoccupation of his pupil during the next quarter of an hour. Sylvia did her best to obey him; and Edna, intent on keeping him in the best of humor, expressed her enjoyment of a situation whose finish she anticipated far more eagerly than did her friend; for Sylvia, although apparently intent on feathering, was planning how she could avoid being left alone for a minute with Edna.

The moment came, however, when they must land, and Judge Trent superintended the putting up of the boat. He would touch nothing, he wished Sylvia to understand and execute each detail, and gave his directions crisply. His niece welcomed this, for it kept him

by her side, a position she hoped he would maintain until their departure for the island.

"What do you suppose Mrs. Lem will say to two people descending upon her for dinner?" asked Edna, when at last the three started toward the house.

"Oh, this is giving her plenty of warning," replied Sylvia. "I will tell her at once."

Edna had requested Judge Trent not to refer to his niece's sketches until she had an opportunity to speak with her alone. To this he had replied that he was a passenger, and that, as Edna had undertaken to discover a genius in his family, he would not interfere with any dramatic effect upon which she had set her heart. The two girls ascended the hill, one on each side of him, and Sylvia's heart sank as he asked Thinkright's whereabouts.

"Oh, he's off in the farm garden with Cap'n Lem," she replied; "but you 're not going to leave me, are you, Uncle Calvin? I 'm always being disappointed of a visit with you. Edna, you hold on to him while I go in and tell Mrs. Lem that you 're here, — although Minty has probably already done so."

Far from obeying, Edna dismissed their escort the instant Sylvia had disappeared.

"This will give me a chance to have my talk with her before dinner," she said; "and afterward she can talk with you."

"Very well," returned the judge; "but don't get flighty, Edna. Remember, I 'm not a millionaire."

Sylvia's face, when she emerged from the house to find her friend waiting alone, was expressive; and Edna answered quite as if she had spoken.

"Yes, I sent him away. I had to see you alone. Please forgive me for yesterday, and give me ten minutes — no, five; I believe you 'll ask for the next five yourself."

It was Edna's old winning smile that again beamed upon her perplexed friend. The vague change and coolness had disappeared. "Choose a place where no one will disturb us," she added.

In silence Sylvia walked to the Æolian pine tree, and they seated themselves on the rustic seat.

"How amazed you must have been at my severity yesterday," began Edna, "when you could not have had the vaguest idea at what I was hinting."

Sylvia still kept silence. She was astonished by the light-hearted, almost humorous note in her companion's voice.

"*You* must have had an idea, I suppose," she returned noncommittally.

To her further surprise Edna actually laughed. "Yes, I had an idea, but I 'm mortally ashamed of it to-day. Could you be so magnanimous, Sylvia, as not to ask me what it was ? "

The girl kept silence for a moment. Surely if her offense had concerned John Dunham, nothing could have occurred since yesterday to alter facts — but stay! and not all the sun kisses that had warmed Sylvia's face could conceal that she grew suddenly pale. If Edna and John had come to a mutual discovery since yesterday, that would explain the happy excitement which seemed to have engulfed all other feeling for Edna.

"You will have to explain a little," she said, and her self-control made her voice cold.

"Oh, it 's too absurd, Sylvia — honestly. Sometime when we 're quite old ladies I 'll tell you, — that is, if you 'll forgive me without my confessing now. Of course if you won't," — Edna's eyes besought her friend merrily, — "I shall have to; but really I want to beg off."

"You have something important to tell me," said Sylvia, "something besides that."

"Two things. I did n't sleep at all last night for two reasons: one was for happiness, the other for regret that I had hurt you."

It was, then, as Sylvia had surmised. What reason was there for feeling such shock? Had she not always been prepared for this, and been waiting for it?

"Oh, I can't bear to have you look so frozen, Sylvia." Edna suddenly took her friend's hand. "I do apologize sincerely for yesterday, and I am going to tell you what no one else knows or will know for some time, owing to the strange circumstances. The mail last evening brought my father's consent to my marrying the man I love. I 'll not tell you more about it yet, except that he is an Englishman, and we had almost despaired of winning over my parents. What? Not a word, Sylvia?" For the blue eyes gazed, and the parted lips were stiffly mute. After a minute warmth began to flow back into the younger girl's face. The hand Edna held began to return its pressure.

"I am happy for you," said Sylvia, and the two smiled into each other's eyes.

"Happy enough to forgive me on trust?" asked Edna.

"Yes," answered the other slowly; but the question her heart and pride were asking must be expressed.

"Does — does Mr. Dunham know what idea it was that made you reproach me yesterday?"

"John?" Edna laughed. "Oh, dear, no."

"Well," — Sylvia gave a long-drawn sigh, — "I will not press you, though of course I 'm curious."

"You 're very good; and now I 'll come to the other discovery which kept me awake. We found your sketches last evening."

Edna paused.

"Yes, I forgot them." Sylvia's companion noted the light that came into her eyes. "I suppose they are only daubs to you, but I was so happy doing them!"

"And we were happy looking at them. I can't think that with all that talent you are not hoping to study."

"Of course I hope; but against hope, for who would take enough interest" —

"Your uncle. I. Every friend you have."

Sylvia's lips parted eagerly. "Did Uncle Calvin really feel it was worth while?"

"Indeed he did. You can't remain at this blessed little farm all next winter, hibernating. How should you like to come to Boston and study?"

"Oh, it is my ideal!" Sylvia clasped her hands.

"It is going to *be*, my dear. Judge Trent has promised."

The young artist caught her lip in her teeth and drew a long breath.

"Meanwhile you should n't waste time," went on Edna. "The Keenes, — you know Mr. and Mrs. Keene, the illustrators, — have an artist camp in the White Mountains. They are dear friends of mine. How should you like to go up there soon, — in a few days, if I find they will accept you?"

"Edna, you take my breath away."

"Yes, I know; but it would be the finest thing for you, especially if it led to your studying with them during the winter. I don't think there could be a better place for you than their studio. If Judge Trent consents, will you go? I can telegraph to-day. The camp lasts only for a short time, and I don't want you to miss it."

A strange commingling of delight and reluctance seethed in Sylvia's brain, and her thought flashed to Hawk Island.

"To go so soon!" she said, scarcely aware that she spoke.

"Yes, immediately, or it would not be worth while. Such an opportunity, Sylvia; and, if I read the sketches aright, the motive power that lay behind your guarding of those big berries would drive you much further than to the White Mountains."

"Yes. Oh, yes, Edna. What a friend you are!"

"Then it is settled?"

"Yes, indeed, if Uncle Calvin"—

"Oh, leave Uncle Calvin to me. His dry bones are about to be vitalized."

CHAPTER XXXII

A SOFTENED BLOW

THE scanty sunshine of another New England winter had fallen on the ink stains in the offices of Calvin Trent, and spring had come again.

Brave little green twigs approached the window and looked curiously in at the occupants of the two neighboring desks, and the younger man sometimes returned their challenging with speculative and not unhappy eyes.

One morning in early June John found in the mail a letter for Judge Trent, which he passed across to the other desk, unopened.

"'M, h'm," commented the judge, taking it, "another hymn of praise from Sylvia, I suppose."

He regarded the envelope meditatively. "That girl has worked well, Dunham."

"The Keenes say so," returned John. "They 're greatly interested in her."

"Edna has been her good angel, for sure, in all this business," said the lawyer.

"I thought you were the angel in the affair."

"Edna was the power behind me. She persisted until I was glad to buy peace. She 's been indefatigable, that girl: found the right place for Sylvia to live, and kept an eye to her all winter, introduced her to the right people, often had her in her home. She 's a brick, Edna

Derwent is. Something more than style and fuss and feathers about her. Yes, Boy, you think I don't see anything; but do you suppose I have n't taken notice of the way you 've mooned around the last month? Do you suppose I 'd have overlooked your tearing up that deed last week, and putting us to all the extra trouble, if it had been on anybody's account but Edna's? Do you suppose I 'd have let you go to Boston twice as often as was necessary, if I had n't approved? Yes, *sir*." The speaker struck his desk, with a sharp snap of Sylvia's letter. "I *approve*. If a man must marry, let him accomplish something by it. None of this Tennyson village maid business. Let him find a girl with money and position and the right sort of connections that will do him some good and give him a lift in the world. Marriage ought to have some frosting besides what 's on the wedding cake. Folks dream on that, and very appropriately. It 's the stuff dreams are made of, in more senses than one; and after that flimsiness is over, there ought to be something substantial left. Just as many attractive girls who have something as that have n't. It 's sheer perversity when a poor young man sets his heart on additional poverty. Let the Cophetuas have a corner on the beggar maids; but let poor men, and especially young lawyers, get busy elsewhere."

At the beginning of this tirade John had looked up in surprise. At its close he was smiling meditatively at the dingy wall.

"Poor men, even young lawyers, have their pride," he remarked, when the judge had finished.

"Stuff and nonsense. That 's another false standard set up by the poets. You 're an orphan, John, nobody

nearer, as I understand it, than an uncle or an aunt here and there, and that 's one reason I 'm talking to you like a father. Another reason is that you 've been a trump in your relations with me. You 've served me well; but besides that, I have n't been insensible to the civility you 've shown Sylvia. You 've scarcely ever been in Boston without looking in on her and bringing me the latest bulletin. Do you suppose I have n't appreciated how often you and Edna have added her to the outings you 've had together, theatres, and concerts, and all that business? Very expensive, and very bad judgment, all that, if it had n't been justified by such an end in view as Edna herself. Now, you take it from me: I 've lived a good deal longer than you, and I 've seen a host of folks get married, even if I have n't got in the game myself; and when a rich woman wants a man, it 's blind foolishness to keep her waiting while he builds up his bank account. Let him build it up afterward. No law against that. I 've observed a number of signs, Boy, that show that your habits and tastes are extravagant; then the more reason that you should act, and act promptly."

A laugh escaped Dunham. "Has it come to this!" he returned. "I never expected you to urge me in this direction."

The judge made an expansive gesture. "Simply because I expect you 'll marry anyway, and Edna Derwents don't grow on every bush. Can't you understand? Of course, I don't know much about your finances, really."

"Is that the whole question?" asked Dunham. "If I did n't need a banker, should you be reminding me

that a young man married is a man that 's marred, and all that sort of thing?"

"No," — the judge shrugged his little shoulders. "Things have gone too far for that." He began to cut open his niece's letter. "After your tearing up that deed, I 'm not the man to waste my energy."

He leaned back in his chair, and began to read the letter.

Dunham endeavored to fix his attention on his work; but the corners of the judge's lips were drawing down, and once John thought he started. The silk hat was pushed to the last extremity of the back of his head; and once he slowly turned and cast a look at his assistant. Dunham, like a schoolboy discovered in idleness, cleared his throat and began making an ostentatious stir among his papers.

When Judge Trent finally folded the letter his face wore an expression that few had seen upon it. His eyes fastened on a spot upon his desk, while his thoughts wrestled.

Once again he stole a look at Dunham's profile, and there was a queer stirring at his heart. With sudden determination he rose, and, moving over to the other desk, stood behind John's chair and rested both his bony hands on the broad shoulders.

"I 've had a blow, my boy," he said, and his voice was husky.

Dunham swung around and half rose. "Sylvia! Has something happened?" he ejaculated.

"No, no, John. I could almost say I wish it were a worse blow for me than for you."

The young man settled down again, his back to the

judge, whose nervous clutch seemed to desire to hold him in this position. "It 's strange it should come just now, when we had but just been talking on the subject. Edna — I 'm afraid Edna 's lost to you, Boy."

Dunham remained with his elbow on his desk, where he had rested it after Judge Trent's startling introduction. The latter waited a moment, regarding the back of the other's head. "Sylvia says Edna's engagement is to be announced at a dinner to-night."

"Edna engaged?"

"Yes, and to a Britisher." Judge Trent's subdued tone suddenly became violent. "How long has she had him on her string? She has n't treated you right, John; or else it 's your own fault, and you 've shilly-shallied too long with your confounded notions of honor. Which is it?"

Dunham remained silent and motionless; and his shock and grief acted as a quietus on the older man's belligerency. "Forgive me, Boy. This is n't any time to haul you over the coals. It seems it is n't any itch for a title in Edna's case. The fellow has n't any handle to his name, and he has money — or pretends to have. Sylvia says she 's very happy."

"She deserves to be," said Dunham.

"She does n't. She 's a simpleton; and worse, for she 's been leading you on."

"No, she has n't, Judge Trent."

"Oh, of course you 'll always swear to that. Let it happen thirty years hence to your son, and you 'll call things by their right names."

Dunham heard the affection for himself in the strained voice, and he turned slowly around and smiled up into

his partisan's lean, excited face, with eyes that again gave the judge an unaccustomed sensation.

"You 've been a dunce, Boy. Why did n't you get busy at the island last summer, after all your talk about adoration? You could have got her. I don't believe you 've half tried."

John still smiled as he replied quietly, "No. I have n't half tried."

The judge scowled his amazement. "Why not, then?" he demanded, when he could speak.

Dunham hesitated a moment before he answered, "Because I saw that neither of us wished it."

Judge Trent glared at him during a short silence. "What are you mooning about, then?" he burst forth at last. "What are you tearing up deeds for? Why are n't you worth your salt?"

Dunham colored under the vigorous arraignment.

"Oh, you 're a mind-reader all right, Judge Trent. You did n't guess wrong."

"You 're in love?" snarled the lawyer angrily

John nodded.

"Who is it?" explosively.

"Don't you think I 'd better wait and see if I can get her?"

"*Tss!*" hissed the judge in unspeakable scorn. He went back to his chair and sat down, still holding the other's eyes with an angry stare. "You know you have n't any doubt that you 'll get her."

"Yes, I have. Many. There was a time — but that 's passed. She is distressingly interested in other things."

"Any money?" asked the judge.

"No."

"Have you, then?"

Dunham nodded. He saw a ripple of surprise pass over the sharp face opposite.

"What sort of connections has she?"

John smiled. "Well, some of them think very well of themselves."

"H'm. That might be. Are they the sort that could be of any use to you?"

"Why, yes. The most cocksure of them all can do a lot for me if he likes."

Judge Trent shook his head. "Go slow, Boy. It's easier to get into that noose than out of it."

"Why, you complained that I went too slow in the case of Edna."

"Yes, yes, indeed. There you would have had the best possible chances." The judge sighed. "You've missed your life-opportunity; now be cautious."

"You haven't seen Sylvia since she did up her hair, have you?"

The digression was so sharp and unexpected, Judge Trent winked, and came slowly back from his dejection.

"Hair?" he repeated, vaguely. "I shouldn't know whether she did up her hair or not. It's short, still, isn't it? How could she?"

"She puts a tight elastic, or ribbon, or something, around it, right at the crown. It makes a lot of little waves and curls that tumble around — well, just right."

Judge Trent blinked slowly toward the rather tense face.

"She's going up to the farm next week," he said.

"I know she is," replied Dunham. "So am I. She

does n't know it. I 'm going to surprise her. I have n't asked if you could spare me. You 'll have to."

Judge Trent's mouth fell slightly open. Presently he swung his chair around to his desk and began mechanically to examine and separate some papers which he took from a rubber band. Certain ones he tore and threw them into the wastebasket, returned others to a pigeonhole, and all in a businesslike rush, as if to make up for the time he had been wasting.

At last a strange look overspread his face. The blood rushed to it. Again he took off a rubber band and ran his eyes over the various papers. Then he scowled, and, snatching up the wastebasket, fished out the top scraps. He regarded them aghast. Presently a sound rang through that office which had never resounded in Dunham's time. Judge Trent laughed loud and long.

"Boy, I 'll have to confess it," he said, as John looked up in questioning amazement. "I 've torn up that new deed we made out." He laughed again, and Dunham joined him in a spontaneous burst.

"Who are *you* in love with, Judge Trent?" he asked.

"You, I guess," returned the lawyer, bluntly. He rose and came again to the younger man's side, and the excitement in his face showed now as gravity.

"John," he said, "is it Sylvia?"

Dunham rose. "Yes, it 's Sylvia," he answered.

Their hands met in a strenuous clasp.

"You young fool," said the judge after a minute, "is that where you were philandering when you ought to have been courting Edna?"

"You 've guessed right again."

The judge's thin hand clung to the young, firm one, and he tried in vain to hold his lips steady.

"But Sylvia has started on a career. I'm told she paints excellent miniatures."

"I want her to paint mine the rest of her life," said Dunham. "I don't know what she'll say; but — have n't I your blessing, Judge?"

The lawyer shook the hand he clasped.

"You 're a great fool, John," he said tenderly. "You don't know enough to" — he paused, and, dropping John's hand, hurried from the office, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"LOVE ALONE WILL STAY"

"It never ought to rain in June," said Sylvia.

She had just alighted from the train, and was in Thinkright's arms as she said it.

"I had set my heart on just such a drive with you as we had the first time I came."

"This will be far better than that was, Sylvia." He held her off at arm's length, and viewed her deliberately. "We had the sunshine outside that day. This time it 's inside."

He could see it while he spoke, shining out through blue eyes and smiling lips, as the girl looked long into his face.

"It seems to me you are a rather elegant person to be clinging to an old farmer like me," he went on.

"Have I changed, Thinkright? You have n't. Oh, I 'm so glad!"

"Yes, you have changed, little one. I 'm looking at you, trying to find out how."

"I 'm awfully well dressed, for one thing," whispered Sylvia, laughing. "Edna would have it. She 's made Uncle Calvin pay bills that I 'm sure must have shocked him. Yes, I know my things look simple, but they 're right; and oh, how you do have to pay for millinery rightness, *à la* Edna!"

"Well, I think the loafers have stared at you enough," said Thinkright. "Let's get into the wagon. I've brought a rubber coat for you, but very likely it'll be clear before we get home. Why," with sudden perception, "I know what has happened; your curls are gone."

"No, no, not gone, only promoted. I'm going to say good-by to this very proper hat for three months, and I think I'll begin now. It would be a tragedy if it should get wet."

While they still stood under the roof of the station platform, Sylvia took out her hat pins, and Thinkright unrolled and opened her neat umbrella.

"I've brought the umbrella, too," he said, with a humorous appreciation of the difference between that ample cotton shelter and the dainty silk affair he held in his hand.

"So," regarding the uncovered coiffure which had won John Dunham's approval, "so that is what has become of the wreath of curls. H'm. It makes you look — look very grown up, Sylvia."

"It's about time," returned the girl. "Was n't I twenty last February?"

They went to the wagon, where the baggage had been placed, and Sylvia put on the rubber coat and jumped in. A sudden peal of thunder rolled.

"A salute in your honor, my dear," said Thinkright, climbing in beside her.

"I'm delighted," she answered, as the horses started, "for it means showers instead of a three days' rain. Here, let's take the calico tent," she added, "then we can both get under it."

She put her little umbrella under the rubber laprobe,

and, raising the weather-beaten canopy, slipped her arm through Thinkright's.

"I 'm going to paint such a lovely picture of you this summer, dear," she said, studying his face fondly.

"Of me? Oh, no."

"Oh, yes. I won't admit that any one else can paint such a likeness of you as I can."

"I hear good reports of your work."

"My own reports?" she laughed.

"No. Calvin's, Edna's, Mr. Dunham's."

"John's, Mr. Dunham's?"

Thinkright's answer was rather slow in coming, she thought.

"Yes. We 've had occasion for some correspondence on a matter of business, and he has mentioned your promise."

"My promise to what?" asked Sylvia, suddenly interested in the fastening of the umbrella.

"The promise shown in your work," replied her companion, looking steadily between the horse's ears.

"Oh, yes," returned Sylvia in a small voice.

"You were a little mistaken about that match you had fixed up," said Thinkright, "between Edna and Mr. Dunham, were n't you?"

"Yes; and she 's going to marry such a fine man, so worthy of her in every way!" Sylvia spoke with enthusiasm.

"You 're better pleased than if it had been Dunham?" asked Thinkright.

It was his companion's turn to hesitate. "Oh, she did n't ask my advice," she replied at last, with elaborate lightness.

"It 's rather easy to make mistakes about those matters," observed Thinkright.

"Yes; and rather easy in avoiding Scylla to fall into Charybdis." She had spent her winter in endeavoring to avoid Charybdis. Just because it had not been Edna who was John's ideal was no sign that the Princess did not exist, either already selected, as Edna's lover had been, or else still to appear. An acquaintance with Boston, and the dozens of interesting people she had met, had cleared her provincial vision, until she was more than ever wary of believing that an interest in her personality and her work meant anything deeper. There were a number of men who had shown her more attention than had John Dunham, aside from those evenings he had spent with Edna and herself. She had kept her thought filled with healthful interest in her work, the effort to please her teachers, and to make the most of her uncle's generosity; and the winter had gone swiftly. She had spent Christmas with her aunt, and Judge Trent and Mr. Dunham had dined with them on the holiday. After dinner she had gone sleigh-riding with John, far into the frosty, sparkling country, despite Miss Lacey's protest that she could n't see why they would n't rather stay by the fire. Miss Martha declared that for her part she would just as soon sit with her feet in a pail of ice water and ring a dinner-bell as to go sleighing. Upon which Judge Trent reminded her that she had not always felt so; a concession on his part to the past which furnished Miss Lacey with gratified sensations for some time to come; the more that, instead of making some excuse to leave, her old friend had taken with extraordinary grace to the rôle of fireside companion, and remained talking

with her of Sylvia, and mutual acquaintances, until the young people's return.

Sylvia brought her reminiscent thought back to the present.

"How are the Fosters?" she asked.

"Well."

"And my boat?"

"Fine. Waiting for you. Minty wanted to come over with me to get you; but I decided to be selfish." Sylvia squeezed his arm.

When they reached the height to-day, the wide view was sullen; the waves lashing, and gnawing with white teeth at the leaden rocks under a leaden sky. The dripping firs were dark blots on the vague islands.

Sylvia recklessly let go the old umbrella, which fell backward as she stood up in the rain and looked off, affectionately. The damp rings of hair blew about her forehead on the wind-swept height, and she reached out her arms toward the grand, forbidding prospect.

"You can't frighten me, dearest, *dearest!*" she said exultantly. "Rumble and roar as much as you like. I know what is behind the mask."

She sat down and righted the umbrella, and while the horses descended the hill she looked and looked, feasting her eyes on every well-remembered landmark.

The Tide Mill loomed out of the mist.

"Poor dear!" she said, apostrophizing it. "Are things just as desperate as ever?"

Tears were glistening on the closed shutters, and running down the weather-beaten sides.

"I think when the mill is crying like that, it always

seems as if it were softening a little, Thinkright. Don't you? As if there were greater chance of its opening its eyes and taking notice once more."

Thinkright gave a low laugh. "Your miracle has n't come to pass yet, has it?"

"No, but I 'm going to hope, still."

"That 's right. If those shutters ever open I think you 'll have to be the prime mover. No one else seems to care."

"*You* care, Thinkright," replied the girl wistfully. "There should n't be anything sad or hopeless around the Mill Farm, least of all that dear old neglected thing that named it."

"You 're a very fanciful little girl," was the reply; but there was nothing disapproving in the glance her companion bent upon her.

As they drove up to the farmhouse, the living-room door flew open, and Minty was disclosed, prevented by her mother from going out into the rain, and expending pent-up energy by hopping up and down with irrepressible eagerness.

Mrs. Lem appeared behind her, wreathed in smiles, and coiffured and arrayed in her company best.

"It 's so good to be home again," cried Sylvia, "so good, so good!" and she jumped out of the wagon and seized Minty's hands and danced around the living-room in the rubber coat until the child's laughter rang out gleefully.

"And how have you been, Mrs. Lem?" she asked when their breath was gone.

"Smart," replied that lady, regarding the girl admiringly, and wondering whether by patience and perse-

verance she might force her own hair to go into the shape of Sylvia's.

"I do hope you 've brought us a change in the weather," went on Mrs. Lem. "When it hain't ben actually rainin' the past two weeks, there 's ben so much timidity in the atmosphere that I 've got hoarse as a crow, and we 'll all be webfooted pretty soon if it don't clear up."

"You shall have sunshine to-morrow," declared Sylvia.

"I hain't touched the Rosy Cloud yet," said Minty, "even though you wrote I could. Thinkright said I might let her git stove on a rock, and he 'd druther I 'd wait."

"Very well, Minty, to-morrow we shall begin making up for lost time. Let them watch us."

Cap'n Lem soon appeared, and the five made a happy supper party. During the meal the clouds lightened and the rain abated. Mrs. Lem would not hear to Sylvia's assisting in clearing away, but sent her upstairs to unpack her trunk. She was at work at it when the western sun suddenly shone out.

"The rainbow, the rainbow!" shouted Minty at the foot of the stairs.

"Where ? " cried Sylvia.

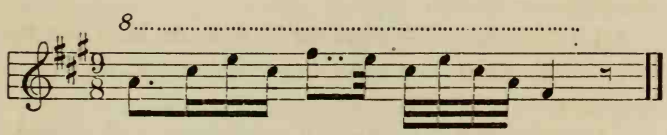
"Over the mill."

Sylvia ran into Thinkright's room, which was on the eastern side of the house, and, throwing open a window, fell on her knees before it. In a protecting, splendid arch a perfect rainbow spanned the cloud above the mill. Rays of sunlight struck full upon the sightless eyes, and kissed its gray face until the tears sparkled into diamonds and the old building was beset with glory.

"The bow of promise," murmured Sylvia. She stretched out her hands to the mill. "Just open them a little way," she said. "You 're no unhappier than I was, but I 've found it such a good world! Just open your shutters and look. You 'll always be glad. Perhaps you can't have everything you want, perhaps not the very thing you want most. What of that? Can't you trust? I 'm learning to. 'Love alone will stay,' and it won't forget. It never forgets."

The girl's eyes lifted to the glorifying arch. One end curved to a distant forest and was lost, and the other dipped deep within the ocean. The Tide Mill grew to radiance beneath its caress. It seemed on the point of yielding, and opening gently to the setting sun.

At the climax of color Sylvia, smiling, dropped her eyelids. She would not see it fade. Suddenly, her ear was caught by a note as of a distant bell; then a tangle of bells, tiny, musical, and the song of the hermit thrush rang out from the far thicket.



Sylvia caught her lip between her teeth, and her heart swelled.

The next morning nature, as always after a gloomy season, seemed trying to cause forgetfulness of its sulks and tears by bringing the whole battery of its charms to bear upon sea and land.

After breakfast Thinkright produced a key from his

pocket. "There, my girl," he said, "is the key to the boathouse. I know you can scarcely wait."

"That 's true," replied Sylvia. "Come on, Minty."

The child's round eyes were fixed solemnly on some point beyond Sylvia's shoulder.

"I don't know as I care 'bout goin' boatin' this mornin'," she replied decorously.

"What?" returned Sylvia, astonished. She remembered now how remarkably quiet the child had been throughout breakfast. "Why, how do you feel, Minty?"

"Smart," returned the child, still with her gaze on the uncertain point in space.

Thinkright's eyes had a humorous twinkle. "I want Minty to help me a little while this morning," he said. "She 'll see you later."

Sylvia turned to him, demurring. "She has been looking forward to it so much," she said.

"Yes, I know. She won't have to wait long," he replied kindly, putting his arm around the child's shoulders.

Mrs. Lem, her hair strained back in its least decorative twist, fixed her offspring with black eyes that snapped.

"You 're a-goin' to have a good time with Thinkright, ain't you, Minty?" she asked, and the child's breath caught through her little nose as she replied promptly: —

"Yes, I be."

Sylvia looked from one to the other uncertainly, but Thinkright was patting the little shoulder he held, and he nodded at her reassuringly.

"Run along, Sylvia. You 'll find everything in good shape."

"I never saw such a man," thought the girl as she went down the hill. "How did he know that it would mean so much to me to go out alone just this first morning? Oh, Thinkright, Thinkright," she sighed. "How great it is to have come where you are; to have one's skylight always open, and the trap door always closed!"

She ran lightly in among the evergreens, and touched their bright buds here and there.

"That 's right, precious things," she said, giving a lingering look up and down the familiar woodland path by the water side.

Then she came through the trees out upon the little dock beside her boathouse, and stood there, looking about with fond eyes at the broad sweep of the Basin waters. The snowy stems of the birches seemed alive as they swayed forward, waving their lustrous banners across the tide. She nodded in all directions, and kissed her hands to the encircling woods. "I 'm exactly as glad to see *you*," she said; "and you shall sit to me for your pictures, all of you. Just as soon as"—

She paused, her lips apart, her eyes wide, for all at once she caught sight of the Tide Mill. Every one of its shutters had turned back. The sunlight was flooding in. She grew pale, sank down upon a rock near by, and gazed. While she was thus absorbed John Dunham came out of the woods and advanced to her. His step creaked the boards of the little dock, and she looked up. Springing to her feet, the color rushed back to her face.

"John, you here? The mill shutters have opened." She looked into his eyes appealingly, while he held both her hands.

"The mill? That's so," he answered. "Gives the old misanthrope a different look, does n't it?"

"But when — how?" asked Sylvia. "Last night it was closed. I saw it; and the rainbow was inspiring it and the setting sun was begging it, and I was coaxing it, and — look! When could it have happened? How could it have happened?"

"You expected a miracle, did n't you?" asked Dunham. "I remember you talked about it last summer."

"What are you doing here?" asked the girl, remembering he had her hands, and withdrawing them. "You could n't have driven over from the village as early as this."

'No. I came up on business, and I 'm staying in the neighborhood."

"But there is n't any neighborhood," said Sylvia.

"Is that all you know about this region?" he returned. "I 'll show you where I 'm staying, some day." John thought of his fragrant couch of hay in the barn. "Is n't it astonishing what a gay old boy that mill has turned into? Look at it sidle around on those posts. It seems to say, 'Come in. The water 's fine.' Why don't we accept the invitation? Let 's go over there."

"Oh, come. I can't wait. Here 's the key to the boat-house."

The hand that gave it to him trembled. It seemed the crown of all that Dunham should be with her the first time she approached the opened shutters.

In a couple of minutes he was pulling the light craft across the Basin.

"Do you think we can possibly get in?" asked Sylvia. "How I have wanted to get inside that mill!"

"Then we shall have to, that 's all," replied her companion, his eyes on her absorbed face, above which the breeze was blowing a little mass of auburn curls. "I think if I stood in the boat, and you stood on my shoulders, you might reach a lower window."

"I hope it won't come to that," she answered; "but I am afraid the ladders will have rotted away. We may find people there. Why, we probably shall. I don't know why I have n't come down to earth enough to realize that only the owners could have opened the mill."

Dunham nodded. "They must have entered to open it, too. What man hath done, man can do. You shall get in, else what is the use of *my* being here? Say you 're glad I 'm here, Sylvia."

She nodded at him collectedly. "If you get me in, I will," she returned.

They found an upright ladder, weather-beaten but still strong, beside one of the posts. Dunham tied the boat, then began to climb up, Sylvia following, and in a minute more they stood inside the desolate building, where strips of sunlight patched the floor. It was deserted.

"Well?" questioned John, as the girl looked all about.

"I thought it would be like this," she answered. "Can we get up higher? There must be a fine view."

Dunham found a flight of steps in a corner, and climbed it, Sylvia following.

The ramshackle old building had platforms rather than floors, leaving space in the middle for the machinery which ran up through it, and stairs led from one to another of these. These steps looked newer than their surroundings. When the visitors had reached the next to the upper floor, Dunham led Sylvia to a window, and together they exclaimed upon the wide beauty of the great, open bay.

"Whoever owns this old mill owns a palace," said Sylvia. She placed her hand lovingly on the edge of a hoary shutter. "Did n't I tell you it was worth while to open your eyes, dear?"

She glanced at John, who was standing, tall and thoughtful, at the other side of the window, watching her. She smiled with rather unsteady lips. "You would laugh if you knew how much it means to me to be standing in here," she said.

"Not more to you than to me, I am sure," he returned. "I 've never forgotten a fanciful thing you said about this mill last summer. You said that Love would open the shutters some day. Listen, Sylvia, do you hear that?"

Across the still water rang the woodland bells that preceded the triumphant flourish of the thrush's song.

"I should like that for my wedding music," said Dunham slowly, after a minute. "Those are the only bells that should chime upon my wedding if I had my wish."

Sylvia's heart beat fast. She thought it cruel of him to look at her like that.

He continued: "There is a spot over there in the woods near a thicket of white birches that I have selected as the spot for the ceremony."

"Very poetical," returned Sylvia. "Such a plan suits this outlook."

"I see there are some more stairs," said Dunham, looking about. "Shall we do the thing thoroughly? Let 's go to the top."

He preceded the girl up the steep flight, and turned to give her his hand for the last steps. Sylvia emerged upon a newly-placed floor, and looked about her in a daze.

She glanced back at Dunham, then again her wondering eyes swept the great apartment in which she found herself.

It was a studio, furnished with every convenience for an artist's work, and many luxuries for an artist's idleness.

Again the girl turned pale, as at the moment when first she discovered the Tide Mill this morning.

She sank into a wicker chair by one of the many windows framing their vast views, and continued silent.

Dunham pulled up an ottoman to her feet, and sat upon it.

She dared not believe the signs in his eyes. "You are Uncle Calvin's messenger" — she began, at last.

He shook his head. "No, I 've bought this mill myself for a wedding present; but whether for my bride or another man's I don't know yet. The only objection to this plan has been that it appeared to take a good deal for granted, and I want you to know that it does n't. You said Love would open the shutters, and it has; but I don't know how much you care for me, I only know how much I care for you."

Sylvia's eyes, startled, incredulous, tender, filled slowly

from her heart, until again John met that Look, never for one second forgotten.

He reached out his hand, questioning still, and now her longing was satisfied to put hers within it, in its rightful home.

Across the silence rang the Hermit's song; for even the Hermit had a mate.

After a while Sylvia lifted her head from her lover's shoulder.

"I suppose there may be some troubles in the world still, John," she said.

"Possibly," he replied, the hint of a smile on his lips as he looked into the face so close to his.

"We can do without joy many times, John. We can meet everything now without a fear. Do you remember:

> 'Kiss my lips and softly say,
> "Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;
> Love alone will stay!" '"